

Family Portrait

A Commentary On Family Relationships Under God

A. Bernhard Kuiper



Colorado Springs 1985

W.H.Gross, editor

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The Christian home is the Master's workshop where the processes of character-molding are silently, lovingly, faithfully and successfully carried on.

Richard Monckton Milnes

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Preface

During the summer of 1984 I presented a sermon series on the nature of the family and the quality of the relationships that should exist under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This text is the outcome of those sermons and has been made available for your convenience and guidance. I sincerely hope that it will be helpful to you and to your family, and that you will more greatly appreciate the extended family that you have in the Body of Christ. “A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (Jn.13:34)

We have been given a new capacity for love in Christ, a love that is unconditional in its quality and unfathomable in its depth. This love of God that has been made available to us is crucial to our walk with Christ because in its outworking it fulfills all the Law of God (Mat.22:37; Rom.13:10; Gal.6:2). God in his grace has adopted us as his sons and daughters and he now calls us to behave accordingly. How do we know we are members of his family? “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” (Rom.8:16) When we speak of the family, we speak of a relationship that exists between us because of Christ, because he has made us God’s children, and this is true both in our home life and in our church life. We are not autonomous in our home any more than we are when we stand alone before the throne of God. He is Lord no matter where we are and no matter what we are doing and no matter whom we are with from day to day and minute to minute. Your relationship to your earthly family should reflect your acknowledgment of this fact as should your relationship to your heavenly family with whom you gather each Sunday morning. Please keep this in mind as you read through this text, and may God bless and enrich your family through knowledge of his revealed Word.

A. Bernhard Kuiper

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Chapter 1

“The Family- Male Man and Female Man”

Now the Lord God has formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to man to see what he would name them, and whatever he called each living creature, that was its name. So man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field.

But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man.

The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason, the man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.

(Gen.2:19-25)

The Purpose of Marriage

It is hardly necessary for me to point out that the home is in trouble not only in America, but around the world. We see marriages falling apart and couples separating for the flimsiest and silliest reasons. Incompatibility is something God deliberately built into men and women. But instead of recognizing it as a condition that can enhance a relationship, it is used by courts of law to separate, annul, and dissolve a union that God has established. We see the effect of divorce and broken homes in the millions of children who have been emotionally abused by this splintering of the home and we are going from bad to worse. What we need to do as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ is to look closely at Scripture, to examine ourselves in its light, to view the world around us from a Godly perspective, and then we must take our stand for what is right in the sight of God. We must not be intimidated or influenced by the evil forces of this world.

You see, the history of mankind began with a wedding in the Garden of Eden. God created a man and a woman, and then he put them together to live as one. God was there to pronounce his blessing on them. God was there to unite them. God made them each unique and yet he made them one. In that fact we have the reason why man shall leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife and become one flesh with her. After God had created the heavens for himself, he then created the world for mankind and mankind means both men and women. “God created man in his own image, ...male and female he created them.” (Gen.1:27). Therefore “men” are male men and “women” are female men. When the Bible speaks about “man,” it speaks about both men and women. When the Bible speaks about “brethren,” it is speaking about both men and women. And when we read in the Old Testament about the “daughter of Israel” we are reading about both men and women. Feminists would have us change the Scripture, taking out all the masculine terms to neuterize the Word of God. Apparently they do not realize that both men and women are included in the term “man” and it was this inclusive term which God created in his own image.

I would like to take time now to discuss very briefly the origin, nature and purpose of man. There is a vast difference between the creation of animals and the creation of human beings. For instance, in Genesis 2:7 we read that God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being, or as the King James says, “a

living soul.” Now animals were not made like that. They were made from the dust of the earth but God did not breathe his spirit into them as he did with man. That’s why Psalm 49 distinguishes the beasts which will perish from those who will realize eternal life. Animals have just one attachment and that attachment is to the earth. The earth is where they came from, the earth is where they belong, and to the earth they will return, period. So when the cat dies, when the dog gets run over, when the goldfish stops breathing, they die. We have a little ceremony with the children in the backyard, but we don’t put crosses above the grave. These creatures go back to the ground from which they came and their place is remembered no more. We buy the child a new pet and the old one is soon forgotten. Animals belong to the earth. They have one attachment: the earth. It is different with mankind.

Man, because of his physical body, also has an attachment to the earth, to the world, for Adam was made out of the dust of the earth as his name indicates (the word “Adam” means earth). He belongs to the earth just as the animals do. He relies on the earth for his sustenance, just as the animals do. He breathes its air, eats its food, drinks its water, and shares its other provisions, just like the animals. But unlike the animals, the earth is not his only attachment. He has a double attachment. He has an attachment to the earth, but he also has an attachment to God. God breathed into us the breath of life and we became living souls, eternally spiritualized creatures. And that is why the Bible tells us that at death, “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (Ecc. 12:7) Never allow yourself to be persuaded by some “wise” person of this world that you are merely a superior animal in the animal kingdom.

We have been created in the image of God for his own glory. We have been created in his image to take our places as his children. That is why the humanist and the atheist, godless people, want us not to believe in these first eleven chapters of Genesis. If somehow they can convince us that this is a fairy tale, they will have taken away from us the basis of our existence. Without these verses we have no foundation, no roots, no platform on which to build our Christian homes. Without them there is no reason why a man should stay with his wife or why we should have families at all. We would have to resort to the reasoning of men to justify such relationships. Marriage would be a mere economic convenience which could end instantly if other financial provisions could be made. That is why it is so important to realize that the Bible is the word of God and not the word of men.

The Bible says that mankind DID NOT come from animals. That is a ploy used by evolutionists to explain away the need for God. If we are the result of some mechanical process alone, then God can be an absentee landlord who watches but never involves himself in our lives. He wound up the watch at the beginning of time and then walked away leaving it to fulfill its nature without further interference from him. For the atheist, that’s as good as having no god at all. While I was in San Diego a short time ago, I went to the zoo. There I found one monkey talking to another monkey about this very issue. The one asked the other a very legitimate question: “Am I my keeper’s brother?” Likening a man to an animal is no less ridiculous.

Now, woman is not a separate creation from man. She was formed from him and became a female man. God created man in his own image and he created them male and female. Woman was created to become what the King James Version calls “a helpmeet,” that is, help suitable for, or help which is meant to be complementary. It doesn’t speak about “the opposite sex” in the Bible. It speaks instead about the complementary sex. Men and women are complementary to each other but they are equal before God. Did you catch that? They are equal before God. There is nothing inferior about a woman. I know people have called me a male chauvinist piglet at

times, but it is not true. Men and women are equal in the sight of God, but each has been assigned a specific role to play. God created Adam with a built-in need for Eve. And so, despite the fullness of that magnificent Garden of Eden where everything was so perfect, so right, Adam was lonely. Adam was incomplete without Eve. As Adam was made from the earth and from the breath or spirit of God, he has his attachment both to the earth and to God. But he had a need for Eve. Eve also was made from the earth, and from the breath of God. She therefore has her own attachments to each. But additionally, Eve was made from the rib of Adam. So there is a three-way attachment in her life: she is attached to the earth, to ADAM, and to God.

Women belong to the earth, but they also have a great need to belong to a man, and to belong to God. Women were never meant to be isolated, to be independent, to be autonomous. Autonomous comes from the Greek word “auto,” which means self, and “nomous,” another Greek word which means law. Autonomous: self-law; in other words, a person who is autonomous is a law unto himself. Perhaps you have seen that perfume commercial where a woman is frying bacon in the pan singing about how she can do it all, yet never let you forget you’re a man, “‘cause I’m a woman, W-O-M-A-N.” She can manage perfectly well on her own, doing what pleases her, needing no one who will not meet her terms. She is autonomous. It’s probably a persuasive sales pitch, but it’s not biblical. In the wedding ceremonies that I conduct, I always make it a point during the ceremony to take ten minutes or so to preach. I’m a preacher, and it’s kind of a habit with me.

But I also realize that in wedding ceremonies we have people who don’t know Jesus, who know nothing of what weddings are about and who certainly don’t realize that the ceremony has its roots in the Garden of Eden. So I tell them what a wedding is all about, and what marriage is all about. When the father comes down the aisle to present the bride, I ask him, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” I don’t want him to say, “Both Mother and I do.” It simply doesn’t fit the circumstances. Biblically, what the father is actually doing is transferring his authority over his daughter to the husband at this point. As she was with her father, so she is to be with her husband. She is to be under his authority, to be protected by him and to be supported by him. She is not to be isolated, she is not to be independent, and she is not to be autonomous.

Eve was a unique creation. She was created for God. She was from God, by God, from Adam, for Adam, to Adam. I’ll repeat that. Eve was a unique creation for God. When he breathed into her, she was given life from God, made by the hand of God, from Adam’s rib, for Adam’s “helpmeet”, and given to Adam by God. So she came from God to Adam with love. Here she is, beautiful in appearance, wonderful in her nature, a true miracle of God. Eve most certainly was not a clone, or a lucky mutation. She was unique, exquisite, and perfect. She had her own unique nature, her own unique character, her own unique body, her own unique function in life. And the purpose of all this was to glorify God. Eve was created to complement or complete Adam so that the two would become one. God intended them to be fruitful and to fill the earth and subdue it. That is the reason she was created and how. But somewhere along the way she and Adam got lost.

Have you ever noticed what people do when they get a new apartment? You know the feeling. When you walk in the apartment for the first time it resembles a barren, concrete cubicle. It’s tucked away on the forty-fifth floor of a glass and steel tower, with one little window looking out from a desolate mausoleum. The very first thing they do is go down to the florist to buy hundreds of dollars worth of potted plants. The next time you see the apartment its like walking into a jungle. It’s an interesting throwback. Men and women were created in a garden. We weren’t

created among the rocks. We weren't created in a concrete cubicle nor in an artificial jungle. The garden is the place where you and I, in Adam, were placed by God many eons ago and even now we continue to seek it out almost instinctively. We want to be surrounded by God's beauty, by green grass and by flowers richly carpeting the fields in seas of color and life. We nostalgically reach back to that first garden, as if trying to reclaim the splendor that was lost to us through sin.

Let's look, then, at male man and female man as sin made them. The first problem that arose in the Garden of Eden was that Adam and Eve believed a lie. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator." (Rom. 1:25) The lies may change from year to year, but you and I are still being tempted to exchange the truth of God for a lie today. Satan whispers in our ear twenty-four hours a day, compelling us to sift out the truth again and again. We read the paper but can believe only a portion of it. We watch TV or listen to the radio, but so many of the commercials which bombard us are lies, petty deceits to convince us to buy products that cannot deliver what is promised. We hear false accusations that age has no beauty but is a thing of shame. You know it isn't true. You know that you are being lied to, but the fantasy to look young forever is so appealing.

Eve was lied to with a very appealing fantasy too, and she believed the lie. Families have suffered ever since. From that time on there hasn't been one perfect family, not one perfect marriage, not one perfect couple. I can honestly tell you that although my wife and I have been married twenty-six years, we have never had one argument. We've had a thousand arguments! You see? There hasn't been one perfect relationship since the Garden of Eden, not even my own. And why not? "For ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All of us have been affected by sin. While you've undoubtedly heard of the Seven Wonders of the World, in Genesis 3:1-6 you can read about the seven calamities of the world:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The Seven Calamities

The seven calamities that came into the world through this event are these:

1. *Eve listened to the wrong voice.* Satan first tried to instill doubt by asking if God's word was really as clear as it appeared. Perhaps God's command was only figurative as we are told Genesis is only figurative. Then Satan tried to make her envious of the advantages of breaking the command. She would be God's equal, able to choose for herself what is right and wrong. Today, evolutionists tell us that if we can discover HOW the world was created, then we won't have any need to know **who** created it. The process will be our creator, and knowledge of the

process will make us an equal to the legendary God of the Bible. We must be cautious of what voices tell us, weighing them carefully against the immutable truth of God's word.

2. *She looked at the wrong thing.* "When the woman SAW that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, she took some and ate it." All sin begins with an evil desire within us (James 1:14). When we see the object of our desire we come to the testing of the faith that is also within us. We can either act on the desire, and give birth to sin and death, or we can abstain from the desire (1Peter 2:11) and continue to live in Christ. Isn't it easier to avoid the test than to overcome the desire? There are places where Christians don't belong, and there are things which Christians shouldn't see if they are to avoid the temptation that will surely follow.

3. *She gave the wrong interpretation to what she saw.* Eve put herself in the place of God when she interpreted what she saw as good even though God said it was not good and would lead to death. She appointed herself judge over the matter and thus competed against the Judge of all the Earth. She was in opposition to God and to his word. Each and every time we sin we are doing the very same thing! We are saying that we know best and that we are every bit as competent as God to determine right from wrong in a given situation.

4. *She desired the wrong things.* Eve would have had no problem with temptation if she hadn't the wrong desire to begin with. You cannot be tempted with what you do not want. Can anyone tempt you into a bloody nose or a black eye? Of course not! Neither can you be tempted into signing over everything you own to a stranger. But you can be tempted into a rage that will lead to a bloody nose. Or you can be tempted into gambling in hopes of getting something for nothing so that when you lose you will be forced into signing away everything you own. We must change our thinking and desire the things of God. "Seek first [God's] kingdom and [God's] righteousness, and all these things [you NEED] will be given to you as well." (Mat.6:33) Then Satan cannot tempt us into sin.

5. *She did the wrong thing to herself.* Eve acted on her desire and it led to her death, to her separation from God who is the source of all life. She acted on her desire because she failed to appreciate God's love for her and God's provision for her safety and well being embodied in his command to her. And failing to appreciate his love, she failed to respond to his love with obedience. "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world."(1John 5:3,4)

6. *She did the wrong thing to her husband.* Eve was not content to sin alone but needed an accomplice to assuage her guilt. Don't we hear from our children, "But EVERYONE is doing it!" when we try to protect them from their own unwise desires? We all want to feel that we belong to the group by taking on the identity of the group. But our identity comes not from men but from God. Our identity is the identity of Jesus Christ. "I have been crucified and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal.2:20) "Made in the image of God" means more than form. It means made in the character of God. Having the character of Jesus Christ means that when the world looks at us they should see his character reflected in our actions, in our words, and in our attitudes. That character cannot be taken on by church membership, or doctrinal subscription, or by any other form of group identification. It can come only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ built on knowing who he is from his word, and prayerfully acting out in our life the knowledge which we have thus acquired.

7. She blamed the wrong person. Eve, like all of us, needed a scapegoat, someone to pin the blame on so that the responsibility would not fall on her own shoulders. When we read in James that we shouldn't say that God is tempting us (1:13) it might equally be said that Satan doesn't tempt us either, because it is our own evil desire which tempts us. "The devil made me do it!" has no value at all as an excuse for sin. There is one time only when we may rightfully pin the blame on someone else, and that is when we say to God, "forgive me for my sin, Father, in the name of Jesus Christ who died in my place to pay the penalty for my sin. Blame him and not me, though I don't deserve it."

The Spawning of Sin

From this passage we can learn the following things about sin:

- Sin starts with questioning the Word of God.
- Sin continues with ignoring the Word of God.
- Sin multiplies by opposing the Word of God.

God made Adam and Eve fully grown. They never had to learn to sin or be taught to sin. Sin made them full-fledged sinners in a single moment. Adam chose to follow his wife rather than the commands of God, and the consequence was to open himself up to sin. Rather than accept the responsibility for his own actions, Adam immediately blamed who? Not just Eve. Adam had the audacity to blame.... God! "The man said, 'The woman YOU put here with me--- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'" Adam is really saying, "It isn't my fault! If you hadn't given me this woman, everything would be fine, Lord. We would still be friends if you just hadn't made this woman! SHE did it!" When God asked Eve what she had done, she immediately blamed the serpent. So we see that it took no practice at all for them to become very experienced liars, rationalizers, and blame-shifters. What we have here is a very subtle role reversal that led to all the trouble.

Where previously Adam had a double attachment to the world and to God, and where Eve had a triple attachment to the world, to Adam and to God, NOW God withdrew himself from them and they became slaves to the Evil One. Now Satan took hold and possessed the hearts of Adam and of Eve. If Adam and Eve had never sinned, all of us would still be perfect. We would have to TEACH our children how to lie and how to steal and how to break God's commandments. Because the attachment to God has been cut, however, the Bible says we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph.2:1). Now we have our attachment to the Devil and must fight constantly to teach our little ones NOT to tell lies, NOT to steal, NOT to break God's commands. Sin comes naturally and good has to be taught. You know how difficult it is to teach your child to memorize one verse of Scripture. But let them listen to some rock music for a minute and they can repeat back to you just what they have heard. To get them to learn Scripture is agony! You have to promise them bicycles and trips to Hawaii...

We sin automatically. It is part of our sinful nature. And that is why it is absolutely ridiculous for Christians to try to get help in their marriage from a secular counselor or psychiatrist who will not deal with the origin of man and the sin of man. If you don't acknowledge the fact that a person has a bias to sin, to automatically do wrong, then of course you can never come to the point where the person and his relationships can be healed. If a doctor will only bandage you and give you some aspirin when he should be opening you up and taking out your appendix, you

know you're going to die. It is no different when the affliction is caused by sin. You must deal with the root of the sin and cut it out like a cancer. Its so easy for people to do wrong.

At first there was the attachment to the world and to God, but now that sin has entered our lives there is the attachment to the world and to Satan. This is the first role reversal. Once Satan gained a foothold he took over the life of Eve. And she then took over the life of Adam. When God decreed what would follow from their sin he said to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Gen.3:16) The word "desire" comes from the Aramaic and means "ambition" or "desire to take over and control." What is being said is that Eve will have a desire to rule over her husband, to take his place, but he will rule over her instead. We see this inner desire at work in the feminist movement today. It is a role reversal, back to front, from what God had intended in his holy and perfect plan for women. If you go the opposite way from God's will, you will never reach satisfaction or happiness in your life, nor holiness as God intended you to have it.

Because of their sin and rebellion, a radical change took place in Adam and Eve's relationships with God. with each other, and with the world. As we so often do ourselves, Adam and Eve tried to block this change by covering up their shame and their sin. Perhaps, they hoped, God wouldn't notice. Traditionally, it was the fig tree from which they took the fruit and yet they sewed together coverings made of fig leaves. What could they have had in mind to say to God? "Look Lord! Remember that tree you told us to leave alone and not eat any of its fruit? Well, we made these wonderful clothes from the leaves of the tree, but while we were picking the leaves, the leaves Lord, not the fruit, one of the fruits dropped off. And rather than let it go to waste, we decided to eat it." They gave themselves away by the very actions they were hoping would hide the sin. It's so typical that we use the products and circumstances of our sin to justify what we have done. The coverings they had made for themselves were just plain inadequate, and so God provided them with coverings made from the skins of innocent animals. We see even here that it took a blood sacrifice to adequately atone for their sin. It was a foreshadowing of the blood sacrifices of ancient Israel, which in turn foreshadowed the sacrifice which would be made by Christ. It is for this reason that we will see Adam and Eve in heaven. You see, their sins were covered by the grace of God, just as yours and mine are covered by his grace.

Adam and Eve's task hadn't changed, nor would the consequences which flowed from their sin, covered or not. They still were commanded to fill and subdue the earth. Eve conceived and gave birth to two sons who inherited the consequences of their parent's sin and died. But God was faithful and Eve soon gave birth to Seth and then to many other children who would eventually give birth to the entire human race. Life went on, in toil and in hardship now, rather than in joy and ease, but it went on. One ray of hope appears in the midst of all this guilt and pain. It is the promise of salvation held out in the very first gospel verse of the Bible: Gen.3:15. Underline it. It is the promise of the Messiah who would crush the head of Satan. In Romans we find that promise repeated and about to be fulfilled as Paul writes, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." (Rom.16:20) Even in the days of Adam and Eve, it was God who atoned for them. Having made them the promise of the Messiah, he takes away from them any self-righteousness and any home-made remedies they might have offered. God gives us here the first hint of the atonement for sin that the son of God would make on the cross for our salvation.

The Lessons Learned

What have we learned?

First, we must take the Genesis account very seriously. I'm going to stick my neck out and say that you cannot be a Christian and bypass the first eleven chapters of Genesis. If you do bypass them it must be because you lack faith to believe, and without faith it is impossible to please God. If you cannot please God through Christ then you cannot be born again. We cannot allow the world to intimidate us with theories that they cannot prove. If we give in to the world, then we undermine the very foundation which God established for us in our husband-wife relationships and in our parent-child relationships.

In Ephesians 1:4 we read that God "chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." This means that if we belong to Jesus, then you and I also belong to the elect and God had our names recorded in the Book of Life before the beginning of the world. It doesn't say that God chose you after you had progressed from being an ape. It says before any of the creation had begun you had already been called to be a child of God. When God made Adam he made someone altogether new and wonderful, a living soul attached to the world and to God.

The second thing we learned was that we were not created for ourselves. Families do not exist just for the sake of having good families. They exist to serve the Lord God. That family is there to glorify God.

The third thing we learned was that there is a battle going on. I doubt if very many of us have to work by the sweat of our brow like the Bible says, battling just to stay alive. But there is another battle going on in this world. It is a battle that requires fathers and mothers to pray for the protection of their children. We try to put every conceivable safeguard around our children and our homes because Satan is there with thorns and thistles trying to choke any spiritual nourishment that we give our kids. Don't ever think that your children are going to be all right if you leave them alone. It's a battle that rages around us daily, and we need to be aware and alert against the wiles of the Evil One before he penetrates our home. Many children in our own congregation feed on a constant diet of rock music. Let me tell you something as a warning. That music is going to eat them alive. It's going to destroy them. I'll tell you why.

A man who may be joining us on staff here shared a story about his experience as a basketball coach. He allowed the kids on his team to have rock music on the bus as they drove to the games, which sometimes were as far as a hundred miles away. He couldn't figure out why it always took his kids till half time to settle down and get their act together. It wasn't like that when they had practice straight after school or when they played a home game. It was always after the long bus trip. He finally concluded it was the music on the bus and he cut it out. Afterwards they won game after game because they could concentrate on their team effort right from the start of the game. Rock music panders to self-importance and to self-satisfaction. It feeds on the inner drives of the sinful nature for power, for control, for tearing down rather than building up. There is a sinister and Satanic battle going on for your children and for your home and for your marriage. And by the sweat of our brow we must scratch out a spiritual existence for ourselves and our families.

The fourth thing we learned is that we have a natural bias to sin. Even as Christians its easier for us to do wrong than to do right. We need to constantly remind ourselves of that and be alert to live lives worthy of our calling.

Finally, we learned that there will be no help available for anybody, for any home, for any family outside the help that's available from Jesus Christ. That help comes to us through the grace of

God who has forgiven our sins by the Blood of Christ. That same forgiveness restored our relationship with God and our attachment to him. It healed the wound inflicted by Adam and Eve's original sin. Thank God for his Word to us. Pray that God will help you to realize that it is a tremendous victory for the atheists, the humanists, and the evolutionists when so many Christians are willing to surrender the first few chapters of God's Holy Word. We may not understand it all, but God hasn't asked us to live by our understanding, by our education, or by our perceptions. God has called us to live by faith. And in faith we say that Genesis 1:1-11 presents no problems to us, scientific or otherwise; rather we thank God that he has recorded our beginnings for us, and that he has laid down his Divine pattern for mankind: for men, for their wives, for their families, and for their relationships to the world and to God. What has been laid down in God's word is sacred and cannot be an option of convenience in our lives.

As we look at the family in the next few chapters, at how indispensable it is and yet how disposable it has become, pray that we will all be more aware of and more alert to all the dangers that surround us.

Chapter 2

“The Family as Sin Spoiled It”

In this chapter I want to talk about the fact that sin spoiled God’s wonderful plan for the family. Most people cannot believe sin exists. They attach different labels to it, trying to redefine it, trying to deny its existence and so avoid any responsibility for it. When we ask people out in the world “what’s wrong with the world that causes so much strife and suffering?” we hear all kinds of reasons, usually none of which involve personal responsibility. People tend to believe the education system is at fault, or perhaps it’s the frustration of pollution, or the fear of nuclear wars, the threat of crime, the consequence of overpopulation, or the desperation caused by hunger and corruption. There are many, many excuses and justifications for what is wrong with the world, but unless the person we ask knows the word of God, unless that person has a personal relationship with God, we will seldom hear that the basic problem is with man and not with any of these other things. These ‘causes’ are really just the symptoms, the ramifications, the miseries that are produced by sin.

The Reality of Sin

If someone has a fever and there is pain in his stomach we take him to the doctor. We are not satisfied with the fact that the person has pain and a fever. We want the doctor to tell us WHY that person has a fever and WHY he has pain in his stomach. In the same way, we must ask WHY are things wrong in the world? WHY is there a problem with the education system? WHY do we suffer with pollution, nuclear proliferation, crime, overpopulation, hunger and corruption? WHY do things foul up? WHY do families fall apart? WHY do two people who walk down the aisle of the church to be married one year, walk down the aisle of the courthouse just a few years later to file for divorce? Why does that tiny bundle of joy, which gave us so much happiness at birth, wind up in a pitched battle with the parents by age 6, 10 or 16?

Well there is a good reason for these problems, and the Bible is the only book that will help us to truly understand what that reason is. The Bible is wonderfully honest about our human nature. I pray that we will be able to accept the Bible’s conclusion that until we deal with the problem of sin in our lives, we will never enjoy a happy marriage, never have a happy home, never have good relationships with our children, and certainly never understand the problems that plague the world.

Four hundred years ago forty men worked together four years to put together the Westminster Confession of Faith, a statement in short form of the eternal truths embodied in Scripture. In addition to the Confession, they developed a teaching tool called the Catechism, which is a summary of the Confession in question and answer form. By memorizing it, adults and children alike can learn the true doctrines that are embodied in Scripture. Without doctrine there is no Christianity, because doctrine is nothing more than a clear statement of what we believe about Jesus Christ. I’d like to use the Catechism to explore this fundamental problem called sin.

The Nature of Sin

Question fourteen from the Catechism asks, “What is sin?” The answer it provides is this: “Sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God.” In other words, sin happens when an individual fails to fit the pattern, the plan, the law that God has written. In Psalm 119 it repeats again and again the desire to do God’s will and to delight in his commands and in his

law, to be conformed to them like molded clay. Sin is nonconformity; it is saying, “No, I don’t want to do that.” Sin is not just failing to conform to God’s law. It is also transgressing his law. That means not just failing to do what is required, but deliberately doing the very opposite of what is required. We call these two kinds of sin sins of omission and sins of commission.

Question seventeen of the Catechism asks, “Into what estate did the Fall bring Mankind?” What is the situation man found himself in after Adam and Eve sinned? The answer is, “The Fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.” This is why it is impossible for people who are engaged in an endless pursuit of happiness to ever succeed in that pursuit, despite giving all they own and possess, despite exhausting all their time and all their talents. When things are miserable in your life and you haven’t confessed your sin, you are going to have to live with that misery and sin because you have no way to rid yourself of them apart from God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Question eighteen: “Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate wherein man fell?” That is, what is the nature of the sin we are talking about? The answer: “The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called ‘Original Sin,’ together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.” That’s a whole mouthful. There is the guilt of Adam’s first sin that was discussed in the first chapter and which you can read more about in Romans chapter 5. Then there is the lack of original righteousness. You see, we didn’t start out as righteous creatures who became corrupted by the world. Rather, we began as corrupted creatures who tainted the world around us with our sinfulness. God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen.3:17).

The Pervasiveness of Sin

Let’s look at some Scripture from Isaiah 1:4-6, where God is speaking to his rebellious nation, a nation which is showing a lack of conformity to his will,

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken:
“I reared children and brought them up, But they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger,
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”
Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt,
a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.

They have forsaken the Lord;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.
Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion?
Your whole head is injured [lit. “sick”] your whole heart afflicted.
From the sole of your foot to the top of your head
there is no soundness-- only wounds and welts and open sores,
not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

There you have the prophet Isaiah’s words describing the state of fallen man evidenced by the nation of Israel’s transgressions against God. EVERYTHING about his people is corrupted from the mind to the heart, from the head to the toe; they are totally and absolutely corrupted. In Matthew 15:1-20 we read about man’s total corruption from original sin and about the things which proceed from his lips because of that corrupted nature. “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what

make a man unclean;" Or in Romans we read, "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." (Rom.8:7,8) The corruption of our entire being by sin makes it impossible for us to abide by God's law. Our transgressions of that law are not isolated moments of weakness, but natural consequences of a sinful nature. What remedy could we possibly provide for such a malady? There is none apart from the wonderful grace of an Almighty God who has sent his son to heal us of this affliction and free us from our bondage to sin

Question 19: "What is the misery of that estate wherein man fell?" What kind of misery has our sin caused us? The answer: "All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever." I met this very nice couple one time who said they had a very nice preacher, very loving, very kind, someone who never talks about Hell. He's not one of those hellfire and brimstone preachers. A lot of people are very comfortable with that. Call that man what you may, if he doesn't preach about hellfire and brimstone he is not a servant of Christ, because Jesus spoke more about Hell than he ever did about heaven. There are more curses and more warnings from the lips of Jesus than there are blessings. We have grown up in evangelical circles today with a misconception and misrepresentation of God as a being who loves everybody and everything is still O.K. no matter what we do or say. Unfortunately (or fortunately) none of that is in Scripture.

The Effects of Sin

There is nothing in Scripture to support the view that God loves the homosexual but not his homosexuality, that God loves the abortionist but not the abortions he performs. The sin is never divorced from the sinner. The sinner goes to Hell with his sins still attached. The sin cannot be divorced from the sinner until Jesus Christ comes between and makes that separation. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear."

In Ephesians, chapter 2, Paul describes the estate of sin, "As for you, you were DEAD in your transgressions and sins." Again we find that word 'transgression;' it means being in a place where you have no business being, being in a situation in which you have no business, crossing over a boundary into forbidden territory. You have 'transgressed.' "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful NATURE and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were BY NATURE objects of wrath."

As pastor of this church, if I do nothing else, I want to get you away from all this garbage that we have grown up with. Representing God as all-loving without considering his holiness, his righteousness, and his justness is a kind of evangelical humanism. It is a form of idolatry that simply cannot be found in Scripture. We have heard for so long that God is a namby-pamby, a mushy sort of god who puts up with anything anyway. He loves you no matter what, so just try to do your best and everything will wash out O.K. in the end. If that was in the Bible I would preach it, but it isn't. If I come across sometimes as unloving and uncaring, then I'm sorry but I want to give it to you just as God has laid it out in his infallible word. If I fail to tell you accurately what the problem is, then you will turn to the wrong medicine to cure what ails you.

The most important thing about Paul's statement in Romans 8:7 above is that it attacks the problem at its source: the sinful nature of man. If sin was no more than an act of doing something bad or of not doing something good, then somehow by sheer perseverance, by proper training or environment, by gritting your teeth and doing the best you are capable of doing, you would be able to prevent yourself from sinning. Sin is not just a bunch of acts. It is the very nature of fallen man. There is something sick at the very core of mankind. There is something wrong at the very heart of our being. It is our very nature that must be renewed. In the absence of renewal by the Holy Spirit of God there can only be misery and Hell. And you can't do anything about it on your own or become anything different than what you are. That's why people turn over new leaves, and more new leaves, and more after that. Their leaves get brown and rot away, because they are no better than Adam and Eve's coverings of leaves. They are homemade remedies that are inadequate to bring about a cure. Christ is in the business not of giving us new leaves, but new life.

The Eight Cannots

Let me give you eight cannots from the Bible to help you understand why you will never change on your own, why you need the help of God Almighty. These quotations do not contain the words "may not." "May" implies permission to do something. Instead they use the word "cannot" which shows there is an inability to do something. Before the main meal is served a child may ask if he can eat ice cream. We could respond with "yes" because the child certainly has the ability to eat it. The child should be asking, "MAY I have ice cream?" to get permission to do what he is perfectly capable of doing. And of course we will tell him "No." We often fail to distinguish the two words 'may' and 'can' in common experience, but in Scripture it is essential that we keep them apart in meaning. Talking to other people who do not have the ability to see, to hear, to understand, or to accept the Gospel is like talking to a table. They cannot respond. It just isn't in them. In short order, this is why:

1. John 3:3: "Unless a man is born again he CANNOT see the kingdom of God."
2. 1 Cor.2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he CANNOT understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."
3. Rom.8:8: "Those controlled by the sinful nature CANNOT please God."
4. John 8:43: "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are UNABLE to hear what I say."
5. John 14:17: "The world CANNOT accept [the Spirit of Truth], because it neither sees him nor knows him."
6. John 6:44: "NO ONE can come to me UNLESS the Father who sent me draws him."
7. 1Cor.12:3: "NO ONE who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and NO ONE can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' EXCEPT by the Holy Spirit."
8. John 12:39: "For this reason they COULD NOT believe."

So we see that without the Spirit of God, without being born again, people cannot see the kingdom of God, cannot understand it, cannot please God, cannot hear his words, cannot accept him, cannot come to Jesus Christ, cannot confess him Lord, and cannot believe the Gospel. That

shows how inadequate we are to save ourselves without the help of Christ. That's what sin does to us. That's why the subject of sin cannot be avoided when we discuss the strife and suffering of the world.

How then, has sin affected family life and marriage relationships? First let's look back at Genesis to see what change took place in the nature of man as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (1:27) "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in HIS OWN likeness, in HIS OWN image; and he named him Seth." (5:3) Adam was created in the image of God, and so was Eve. Then sin came into their lives. They transgressed the law of God; they lacked conformity to the law of God and in rebellion said, "We WILL eat from this tree." Because of their sin, fellowship with God was cut off; they were on their own, controlled by a sinful nature. Rather than having God's nature in them, Satan's nature entered into them and enslaved them. In this new state of being they produced a son named Seth, no longer in the likeness of God, but now in the likeness of Adam and Eve.

Here is where the real trouble starts. Unlike angels who do not reproduce, men have the power to recreate another like themselves. The fathers' sins repeat and ripen and flourish in the lives of their children. If Adam had loved God, so would Cain. But Cain was rebellious and jealous of his brother Abel, and so he made an offering to the Lord of some vegetables. Abel made an offering to the Lord of one of his flock. When I was a young boy this troubled me a lot. Why was this so? Why was God so mean to Cain? Why did he accept Abel's offering but not Cain's? Isn't that favoritism? Cain couldn't help the evil that was in him. But Cain had not listened to God. Cain knew what was expected of him because we read in the fourth chapter of Genesis that God spoke to him about the problem, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" But Cain did not do what was right.

We know from the book of Hebrews and from the sacrifice made on behalf of Cain's parents by God himself, that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins. Rather than acknowledge that there was something sinful inside him, rather than bow his knee humbly before God Almighty and repent of his sin in the proper way, Cain offered up what was unacceptable to God as if to challenge God's authority. He tried to do it his way, not God's. When God refused his offering but accepted Abel's, Cain still did not repent. Instead he killed his brother. It's a typical human way out: kill the one who has called to your attention the need to conform to the will of God.

This is the first picture we have of family life, and what a pathetic scene it is. Cain did not listen to God, and we see here the problem which necessarily follows from such disobedience: the destruction of family unity, of family love, of family strength, and family support when it is needed most. In the sin of the first child we have the root and type of all children. Instead of loving God, they love themselves. Some of the nastiest things you'll ever see anywhere are in the nursery. Let's face it. Children are not sweet little innocent people. They are mean, selfish, cruel, inconsiderate, lying, deceitful human beings who must be trained in the ways of God and taught to put away those traits with which they are born.

The Remedy for Sin

How ridiculous it is that the thousands of psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors who practice in the world teach just the opposite. They peddle their garbage that children are born

with a natural tendency to love and are spoiled only by their parents. Therefore take the children away from the parents and make the state the custodian of the children and the world will be a wonderful place in which to live. But the state will not teach them about God, and the state will not mention the problem of sin, and the state will not teach them to humble themselves before the Creator of all the Universe. It will raise them up as godless humanists who will bargain for a set of mutually agreeable laws by which to live. Live and let live; do whatever makes you feel good; I'm O.K. you're O.K. and all the rest of that trash. Instead of loving God we love ourselves; it's really self-worship. Sin is constantly covered up. The secret of sin's success is in the belief that sin doesn't exist.

Despite the fact that there are more professionals running around the countryside than ever before, telling people how to have a wonderful life by ignoring the problem of sin, we have a greater percentage of people than ever succumbing to suicide, alcoholism, and divorce. We have more runaway children, unwanted pregnancies, and whatever other horrors you would care to name than ever before. I don't know what else has to happen before people wake up and say "Stop! We must be doing something wrong somewhere!" The solution our civic leaders give us is to build more jails and more mental institutions. Why? Because we refuse to turn to the word of God for our answers! The problem with our criminals is not the acts which they commit. The problem with our mentally ill is not the psychoses which plague them. The problem is deep inside them and that problem is sin. They need to confess it, to repent from it, and to be forgiven of it by God. But we permit sin to run rampant because we don't really believe it exists. We treat the symptoms of sin instead of sin itself. Don't underestimate the power of sin within yourself, within your family, and particularly within your little children.

I saw one little boy do something very bad, very naughty in front of me one day, and his mother said to me, "He's such an individual." I said, "No, he's not an individual. He's a nasty little stinker. He's a sinner and he needs to repent of his sins." We undermine the word of God by using nice little phrases to describe sin, to call it by some other name than what it really is. Did you know there isn't one alcoholic in the Bible? They are called drunkards. Don't wish sin away, don't ignore it, and don't call it by some other name than what it is. The Bible doesn't do it and neither should we.

Living in a Sinful World

So, what have we learned in this chapter? How does acknowledging our sinful nature help us in this day and age? We can only succeed in overcoming that nature by the grace of God. If you have been trying to overcome it by yourself, then you had better reread those eight cannots. The first thing you have to do is be sure you have a relationship with God, that you have repented of your sin and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Next, as parents let us be what we want our children to be; set an example. I had a father come to me asking me to talk to his son. He was sitting there puffing away on his cigarette and telling me that his son had been caught smoking pot. He never spent quality time with his son, never talked with him about the Lord Jesus Christ, never walked side by side with his son for any of the sixteen years the young man had been growing up, and yet he expected me to set his son on the straight and narrow path with a simple talk. He must have thought I was some kind of miracle worker.

We bring up our children day by day in the way they should go so that when they grow older they will not depart from the way of the Lord. I said to the father, "Why are you so upset? All your son has been doing is smoking just like you. He's using a different tobacco, that's all." Let

parents be what they want their children to be. Let the husband be what he wants his wife to be. And let the wife be what she wants her husband to be. Paul said, "I want you to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." To the children he said, "Obey your parents in the Lord. Honor them." To the wives he said, "In the same way Christ submitted to the will of the Father, submit to your husband." (Eph.5:22-30; 6:1-4). We can't do any of that on our own. It's not a question of will power but of God's power.

Another problem overcoming sin is the competition going on for the minds of our children from sources other than the parents. The average Christian in America goes to church 2 times a month for an hour each time. Only half of that time is spent preaching so he gets maybe one hour per month. That's 12 hours per year that he hears the gospel, if it is preached at all in his church. But he listens to only half of what is preached because he dozes through the other half, so that's only 6 hours per year of the Gospel. Of what he hears he remembers only half, so that is 3 hours per year. That's a bit less than 50 per cent of what the average child spends watching TV PER DAY. And we wonder why our children are so carnally minded and so full of the world. We wonder why so many people know so little about God, and how few of them ever learn the truth. The Bible says you should sit down with your children and teach them about the truth of God and about Jesus Christ. Let it be normal conversation for you to talk about the Lord with your children. Let me give you an example of the level of Christian instruction that some nominal Christian parents give their children.

I have a good friend, Dave Simmons, who works with Campus Crusade for Christ. This is what his nominally Christian father taught him: There were three boys outside in his yard one day, about a half-head taller each than Dave and every one of them a bully. But Dave's father was a football player and he wanted Dave to be strong, so he said to Dave, "You see those three boys out there? I want you to beat them up so you'll be tough because life is tough." Dave didn't want to go out there, but his father kicked him out of the house. He went up to those boys as his father had demanded, but they beat him brutally. He walked back to his house, blood streaming from his nose and his eyes beginning to swell black and blue. His father yelled, "You got beaten up by those boys?! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! It's hell out there in the world. You've got to be a man!" And then his father beat him up too. That's the level of Christian instruction that Dave Simmons received.

I know a little two-year-old child whose father put him on a table one day. Moving away from the table as he held out his arms to the child, the father said, "Jump! Jump..." And as the toddler jumped from the table, his father stepped away and let him fall to the floor. He said to the badly frightened child, "That's lesson number 1. Don't ever trust anybody in this world." Is it any wonder that children who receive this type of instruction grow up to be criminals, insecure and unloved? We need the help of Christ, and we need his help every single day. The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy tells us what to do.

Hear O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deut.6:4-9

Memorize it. Obey it. Write it out. Attach it to your wrist so that you know that whatever you do it will be for the glory of God. I want you to put it on your front door so you know that your house is dedicated to God. Put it on your gate so that people who enter your yard will know that this house belongs to God, that this family belongs to God. Why am I so emphatic about this? Let's look quickly at why the children of Israel failed to remain faithful to the Lord.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt.

Judges 2:10.

What does that mean? It means the fathers didn't do what God had commanded them to do in Deuteronomy 6:4! May God give us the grace not to look to the world for our excuses and say, "It's just too hard to raise a kid in today's world." Instead let us look into our own hearts and ask ourselves, "Have I obeyed the word of God?" And if we have not, there is no need to despair, because there is forgiveness and mercy and help in our time of need. We CAN become the kind of men and women that God wants us to be, not with our own remedies but with HIS help, with HIS power, and with HIS love. And if God be for us, who can stand against us? "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom.8:31,37)

Chapter 3

“The Family Under God’s Grace”

The most wonderful thing that can happen to a family is to be under God’s grace. I want to put this topic into perspective by first exploring the family under attack. Secondly, I want to explore the family under disaster. And then we will be prepared to explore the family under grace. You will remember from the last chapter that Adam had a son, a third son who was born to him and Eve. But the Bible then emphasizes the fact that this third son, Seth, was made in the image of Adam, and that’s where the problem begins. We were made in the image of our parents. I have been talking a great deal about sin and original sin and I know that bothers some people. When I originally gave this sermon to the congregation, I had someone complain to me that I had talked too much about sin to people who were saved, who were beyond embracing sin because they embraced Jesus Christ instead. Well I congratulate these people on such an achievement, because there is no such animal; there is no human being alive who can claim to be without sin. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (1Jn.1:8,10) And we ourselves become liars if that is our claim. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom.3:23) It is essential to remember the point that I emphasized in the last chapter: the secret of sin’s success lies in the denial that sin even exists.

Acknowledging our Sinful Nature

The last thing Satan wants anyone to acknowledge is that he or she is a sinner, because the moment that happens the Gates of Heaven begin to open up. You know that an alcoholic cannot be helped until he is willing to acknowledge publicly that he IS an alcoholic. Until we acknowledge before God that we are sinners there is no help for us either. The Wesley brothers had great trouble with each other over this point arguing constantly over the perfectibility of Christians. John Wesley believed that a person could be entirely perfected, completely sanctified and sinless while still in this life. John was waiting impatiently one day for Charles, his songwriter-brother, so the two could attend a meeting together. Charles was busy washing his feet in a bucket in preparation for the outing while John stood nearby complaining as always about Charles’ lack of timeliness. As the argument grew more heated, Charles picked up the bucket of water and threw it on John. John’s reaction very quickly confirmed Charles’ belief that there is definitely no such thing as “sinless perfection.” If we learn nothing else from this series on the Family, let us learn that within ourselves, forget about the sinfulness of the wife and the child and the other people in the world, within **ourselves** is the potential to ruin **anything** we touch.

Let’s look now at the family under attack. We’ll begin with the results of a straw poll I took of my congregation during the presentation of this series. I asked them, “How many of you during the first ten years of your life had some Christian influence from a mother, a father, an uncle, or someone else in your family who personally told you about the Lord Jesus Christ, about heaven and hell, the Bible, and so on?” The overwhelming majority came to know the Lord from the influence of a relation. I don’t care how good a job Billy Graham is doing, or a 1000 Billy Graham’s could do preaching 6 hours a day, seven days a week in every corner of the globe, they would not have as great an impact for evangelism as the Christian family. Now you know why this basic unit of society has been under bitter attack during the past hundred years or so.

Almost seventy years ago, the Bolsheviks of Russia, who were communists, tried to do away entirely with the family unit. They took the little infants from their mothers, put them in day-care centers, forced the mothers to go to work right away, gave the babies back to different mothers, and so on in an effort to break the back of the family's influence on children growing up. After twenty years they discovered so many suicides and misfits in their society that they frantically began to reemphasize the importance of the family unit. Yet to this day, nearly fifty years later, they have not been able to undo the damage that was done to the Soviet Union during the period of family disestablishment. The longevity of Russians has dropped five years during that time. In America a man's life expectancy has increased to about 74 years, while in Russia it has decreased to just over 60 years. Suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse are increasing there. These are the ramifications of going against a basic structure that God has put together. But we learn from history that we fail to learn from history, and so we can expect America to go the same way as the Soviet Union unless we safeguard our families now.

Seven Attacks on the Family

Declaring Families Obsolete

There are seven major sources of attacks against the family according to O.R.Johnson, English author of "Who Needs a Family?" The first major attack, he says, comes from "The Prophets." These are not the prophets of the Old Testament but the prophets of the Modern Age. These are the clever humanist and socialist writers who predict what will happen in the future in such a way that the people who read their material begin to believe it as if it were fact. It is the natural tendency for unconverted souls to believe lies which do not attack them directly. These Modern Prophets do not brazenly attack the family, but instead they predict its demise based on some obscure trend they see on the fringes of society. These people cash in on the natural bias people have to believe a lie, to do evil, to reflect their sinful nature; its easier to do wrong than to do right (see Rom.1:25). After awhile, the writings become self-fulfilling. People begin to expect the behavior as a norm and so accept it when they find it. This is the way the world is going. This is the impact of mass media. Let me show you what one of these modern "family therapists" preaches. Years ago, the only family therapists were godly preachers using the Word of God. But we no longer listen to godly preachers; we no longer listen to the Word of God. Instead we need family therapists who base their knowledge on the opinions of men. Here's a sampling typical of these new gurus:

What if all the practices now going on which we have labeled as "morally bad" were instead really evidence of the great variations in human beings? In the case of the many-times married person, perhaps there are some people whose level of interest is short, and so they choose one mate after another. Instead of considering this a shortcoming, what would happen if we treated this as a simple variation? Such people could enter a limited marriage contract for say from one to five years. If the contract were not renewed at its end, then the dissolution of the marriage could take place. Perhaps the married people who have had other sexual relationships outside marriage are not adulterers, but are people with a human need. After all, polyandry and polygamy were once accepted forms of marriage. And why not have a group or communal marriage? When you think about it, marriage merely legalizes a relationship between male and female adults that entitles them to certain property and certain guarantees against exploitation. Why does it have to be limited to just one man and one woman? If we fully trusted one another, and were truly responsible, we would not be exploited and we could share fairly.

Amazing isn't it? See how clever he is? He merely asks "what if?" those things, things which we as Christians recognize are against the Word of God, are simply variations? He doesn't defend them directly. He doesn't even have to support them. He asks, "what if?" Once you accept the possibility that they are simply variations, then there is no stopping the proliferation of variations until everyone is literally doing his own thing and society descends into chaos: no right and wrong, no restrictions, no recriminations, and hopefully, thinks the sinner, no Judgment.

Notice that the author doesn't call sin sin. He calls divorced couples "many-times married people" who suffer from a lower "level of interest" than most; but surely, the author leaves UNSaid, that lack of interest in a spouse isn't a lustful interest in someone else. Surely it isn't a desire to steal the spouse of another, or escape responsibility for a present spouse. Surely it isn't a craving for power and domination that cannot be obtained with a present spouse. Surely it isn't self-indulgent and destructive behavior which reflects some lack of maturity on the couple's part. What the Bible calls sin, we are instead to believe is "sophisticated behavior," tolerance of "alternative lifestyles." Adultery only reflects a desire to terminate an economic contract, rather than a refusal to abide by a legal and holy contract. If it is an economic contract, he asks, then why not have multiple parties to the contract? Well, my response is this: Why not incorporate and sell stocks in the relationship? How ridiculous and ludicrous it all becomes when we refuse to acknowledge God's hand in the ordaining of marriage! As Christians we laugh at this author's proposal and recognize it for what it is: **garbage!** But not everyone does, and that's why it becomes a subtle attack against the Christian family. It undermines our society's support for the family and leads to laws which affect our own Christian family life. We do not exist in a vacuum. We are affected in a very real way by the attitudes and beliefs of our non-Christian neighbors.

The State as Parent

The second type of attack comes from a group Johnson calls "The Social Engineers." These are the people who want to organize a new structure for society, a "New Social Order." The group includes subscribers to socialism and communism and also many sociologists and social psychologists. They hope that if the external structure is properly designed, then the internal structure, the relationships between people, will somehow turn out all right. It has long been recognized that a strong family produces citizens with a strong sense of self-worth, personal value and a positive identity. So you can see that children who come out of a strong Christian family are children who "have it together," who really know that they are valuable people in the sight of God and in the sight of each other. When we understand the role played by the family in producing individuals of integrity and strength then it becomes very understandable why communism fought against the family, and why it fights against Christianity today.

If a person who seems useless and of no social value, a person who has no control over the problems in his life, suddenly acknowledges Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, then that person becomes a new creation, a child of the King of Kings; he has been adopted into the family of God. He is no longer a fearful individual. He begins to walk upright and confident. "This one thing I know: once I was blind but now I see." Communism cannot use people like this. Such people bow to no man, but to God only. They refuse to do what is merely expedient, but steadfastly do what is right before God. They are not rebellious, but neither are they blind followers. This is the strength which no totalitarian government can overcome. This is the power which comes to all children of God by His Spirit. Social Engineers like those under Stalin and Hitler have always failed to influence people who come from Christian families and who have a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, to succeed in restructuring society at large, the strength of the family must first be destroyed.

Removing Social Standards

The third attack comes from “Group Activism” at the political level. We see this activism at work in nations which are declining morally and socially because limited interest groups have seized the opportunity to change the laws to suit themselves rather than the general interest. One of the cleanest and most brilliant countries in the world prior to World War II was Sweden, and yet I read recently that their suicide rate is six times that in the United States (and *we* are number two!). The divorce rate is so high they’ve stopped counting. The children are understandably frustrated, confused and fearful. They have turned to drugs for escape because there is no social order or mutual accountability in their society, just as there was no order or accountability in their own families. Common sense dictates that what we experience in our family life we will translate into our social relationships outside the family. If we have no support and no security in our family relationships then there will be none in our society as a whole.

If you had been in the Netherlands twenty years ago you would have seen a beautiful little country with 1100 people per square mile and yet every square inch clean as a whistle. They sent food around the world, a tiny little nation able to feed other nations. Now if you were to go there you would see how liberal it has become; that’s liberal as in libertine. It’s sickening. Amsterdam is a cesspool with drug addicts by the tens of thousands. It’s a country where anything goes, a true den of iniquity just as it was in Sodom and Gomorrah. To show you how far authority has fallen, even the military has a union. Can you imagine? The captain says, “Shoot!” and the union leader says, “Wait a minute. We’ve gotta have a union meeting.” And that was a country of the great reformation. This is the consequence of political activism on the part of humanists and liberals who together have undermined Christian principles of life and family. They tell us they want a “free” society, one that has escaped from the dead weight of Christian standards. What they really want is lawlessness and autonomy; they want to be a law unto themselves. Group activism is on the move to eliminate Christian standards from society. If we are to stop them we must become group activists ourselves and meet them head-on in the political arena.

Christian Compromise

Fourthly, and I believe this is probably the worst of the seven sources of attack, is “Christian Ignorance.” It is the weakness from within that enables the outside attacks to succeed. We are not aware of the battle that is going on because it is virtually painless. Years ago when Satan attacked the church by physically attacking its members, the church gathered together in prayer to call upon God for his protection. We see that in the Book of Acts. That’s why the church has always grown under persecution. But the subtlety of today’s persecution has left us with our defenses down. When the communists took over China there were less than one million Christians there, and even of these many were butchered under one of the severest persecutions imaginable. Now, despite two generations of suppression, there may be as many as FIFTY million Christians in China! In a few more years it may well be the greatest Christian nation in the world. They were persecuted in a way that was obvious to everyone, and so the Christians began praying and God did great miracles among them.

It is the subtlety of today’s persecution that enables it to succeed, that leaves us wondering if there’s really a persecution going on at all. Because we are ignorant of the persecution going on, or indifferent to it, we are permitting it to gain in strength, in intensity and in scope. We are

theologically ignorant, legally ignorant, sociologically ignorant, and politically ignorant. For too long, evangelicals have thought that involvement in political things meant non-involvement in spiritual things. I think that's a big lie of Satan. During the recent political caucus meetings here in town, people from our church should have filled every one of them, but it wasn't so. We should have been at those meetings not because we're church members but because we're members of the Body of Christ and Jesus reigns in our lives! We should have been there to voice our positions, to exercise our rights as citizens, to select candidates who are men and women of integrity, who are faithful children of God. We have been asleep too long. You should get and read Francis Schaeffer's book, "The Evangelical Disaster," which deals with this very subject. Educate yourself about these hidden attacks against the family and against the church so you can guard yourself against the wiles of the devil and his servants.

Commercial Pandering

Fifthly, there have been "The Commercial Interests" who have been funding the attacks. Our natural bias toward evil has created a marketplace for those who wish to pander to that bias, to cash in on the lustful cravings of those who are without self-control and without Christ. The violence in our movies, the degenerate behavior displayed in pornography, the despondency of alcoholism, drugs, and gambling have been made attractive and appealing to lure the weak and pacify the strong. And we bought it all. We have accepted these things as natural and commonplace, or at least as unavoidable, and so we have given such behavior our stamp of approval. They have become socially acceptable activities. The commercial interests entice our children with ads that would have been banned five years ago. If they stood in alleyways and tried the same thing they would be arrested for trying to corrupt the morals of a minor; but they do it on TV and in the magazines and over the radio, using first amendment privileges to get away with it. It seems that money talks louder than morality and decency. Money weaves a web of rationalizations for what it desires.

We are told to close the magazine if it offends us, turn off the TV and the radio. That's fine for adults, but how do we control what our children are subjected to? How do we erase the words and the images that bombard us and offend us before we can get to the on-off switch? How do we protect our children from the impression that is left on other children, children whose parents are less concerned with such garbage? How do we stem the tide of complacency about open sex, open violence, open crime that has overtaken us? How do we keep from being desensitized to it all, desensitized to the point that violence and crime and deviate behavior no longer shock and sicken us? How can we NOT speak out and put an end to it? If we remain silent we will become willing participants in such sinful behavior. There is no such thing as a silent spectator here. We are either part of it or we are opposed to it. We either join in or outlaw it. The final decision must rest in the marketplace of ideas, in the realm of politics and persuasion. We have not given up our rights as citizens just because we are Christians. Speak out boldly for what is right!

Spreading Immorality through Mass Media

Sixthly, there are "The Mass Media" which I touched on briefly in "The Prophets." Those anchor men of the six o'clock news and the columnists of our nation's large daily newspapers are today's self-professed prophets who are all too willing to enlighten and guide us with their unique wisdom and gifts of interpretation. They have conspired either consciously or subconsciously to erode the beauty and dignity of marriage by their mockery and callousness and cynicism. Yet these are only the visible representatives of the mass media. There are other

unseen manipulators of our minds. One afternoon some time ago I arrived home, mentally tired from counselling. I'm not cut out for counseling and when I do it I need to kick off the shoes and relax for awhile by watering the lawn or watching something funny on TV. Well, I turned on the TV that afternoon and there were these two beautiful girls talking to each other about a boyfriend. The one said, "Hey, I hear you got a new boyfriend. Is it very serious?" and the second girl answered, "Oh, no, its not very serious, we're just sleeping together." I turned it off, utterly disgusted.

This is what is eroding the beauty and dignity of marriage. It isn't the overt denunciation of marriage that might be expected. Instead it is the subtle implication that marriage is passé, that sex is a matter of choice whether to have it inside marriage or out, that everyone is committing adultery, that everyone is sleeping around and that it's O.K. to do that. Well it's not O.K.! And its not as prevalent as the mass media would have us believe. They paint a picture of commonplace immorality to justify their own lifestyles and to convince us not to condemn them. We need to confront the advertisers and the station managers. We need to write the editors of the newspapers and magazines to demand that they clean up their reporting and eliminate their biases. It's time to stand up and denounce the flagrant immorality which is paraded in front of us day by day and hour by hour. We are not doormats for the filth in the lives of others, and we are not out of line demanding that it be kept out of sight and out of mind. It's offensive and we need to let them know that we have been offended.

Spreading Amorality through Public Education

Finally there is "Public Education." It comes to us from TV, radio and newspapers as well as from our public schools. But it is controlled mainly by humanists and antichrists. Polls have shown that an overwhelming number of influential journalists and other public educators have no belief in God, no familiarity with religion, no standard of behavior other than what they choose for themselves and a bias against anyone who disagrees with them. Thus what we are taught by them is tainted with that bias. Some of the books that we get in our schools are also very subtle in their biases. In any school library you can find a little book of poems called, "A Light in the Attic," by Shel Silverstein. Unless you are very sharp biblically and theologically, you will find it very hard to pick up on some of the things that the author is saying between the lines. One of the poems deals with doing the washing up. He says that if you don't want to do the washing up what you have to do is drop a few plates now and then. Sooner or later your mother won't let you wash up anymore.

This is what is being taught to our little kids in school. How to connive to get what you want. This same author also had a record out some time ago celebrating a marijuana smoking competition held in a football stadium. Having popularized an illegal activity he then somehow became acceptable enough to have his book of poems held up as an inspiration and guide for our kids. What we teach our children isn't always what's contained in the lesson materials alone. We place values on things by their acceptability. If we choose a book for our school library, it gains value because it has been chosen. We have "certified" it by selecting it. That sends a message to the child that what he or she finds inside it is also acceptable and valuable. Let me give you an example from a college-level environment.

I was talking with a girl from our church who attended Covenant College, an outstanding Christian College with very rigorous courses and exacting standards. She was transferring to UCCS here in Colorado Springs and was trying to transfer her credits. I asked her if she was

having any trouble getting her courses accepted here and she said the only problem she had was with a course on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. She had taken the course at college level for college credits at an accredited school, but it was not transferable. If she had taken a course on witchcraft or family therapy it would have been transferable, but not a course on the Scriptures. That's where we are. Christians began the schools in America to teach their children to read the Bible and now we cannot get the Bible read in them or have the study of the Bible recognized as an acceptable and valuable endeavor. We place more value on other things and so degrade the Word of God. That message doesn't go unnoticed by our children. The history books in our public schools emphasize the negative aspects of organized religion and ignore the positive aspects. That bias affects the way our children look at the church and its role in society. All of these things are quite painless; all of them happen day by day without any of us saying "ouch!" It's a persecution by manipulation of the mind. We are being lied to but what is most disheartening is that millions of people are believing the lies.

The Family under Disaster

Let's go to the second area of concern, the family under disaster, before going on to our main topic in this chapter, the family under grace. In the Book of Job we are told of the horrendous disasters which befell Job and his family. He lost his cattle. He lost his servants. He lost his ten children together with the home they were in. Then Job's own health failed and he was afflicted with open sores all over his body until life itself was hardly worth the living for him. Job had three basic fears that are revealed in 3:25. "What I feared has come upon me, what I dreaded has happened to me." So we can infer that the fears Job had were these: losing his children, losing his wealth, and losing his health. Three basic fears, fears which can take hold of any of us.

And these fears became the basis of Satan's attack. Here is a man of God, a wonderful man of God, so much so that God expressed delight in him, and "bragged" about him to Satan. "Have you seen my servant Job? There is none like him in all the earth. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (1:8) But Satan discovered Job's three fears, three handles by which to manipulate him. How different it was with the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:30 he tells us as he is about to depart from the world that Satan cannot take hold of him. There were no handles of fear by which to lay hold of the Lord. But it wasn't so with Job, and so disaster overtook him. Notice that Satan left Job's wife alive. For what reason? We find out the answer in 2:9 when his wife says to Job, "Are you still holding onto your integrity? Curse God and die!" Now that's called a helpmeet.

She was helping all right, helping Job into an early grave. You can see why Satan left her alive: she would play Satan's tool as a temptation to Job. She told her husband to curse God and die when she should have been putting her arm around Job and saying, "Job, I'm proud of you. Job I want to recommit myself to you; you're a man of God all the way. I have failed you as a wife at times and I have often failed my children as a mother. I've been demanding and mean. I've had bad moods and months of depression, but now I'm kneeling down in the dust with you with all your sores and I'm putting my arms around you because I want you to know that I love you." Which is the better approach to disaster? Don't abandon your faith because somehow you feel God has abandoned you to disaster. Don't abandon each other because somehow the burden of the moment seems too much to bear. Call out to God without ceasing. Praise him and thank him for **His** strength and **His** will and give glory to **Him** in the depths of your own despair. God did

not abandon Job and He will not abandon us; though all Satan's hordes would come against us we will prevail!

The Family under Grace

Now we're going to take another look at Job and his family to understand just how wonderful God's grace really is. What's so wonderful about this family? Listen carefully. At the head of this family was a God-fearing, praying, worshipping father. And that makes his kids lucky kids indeed, as Calvin would say. How fortunate! How wonderful for these children to have a father who prayed for them daily, a father who offered God burnt offerings daily for his children in case they had sinned against God in their hearts! I'll tell you something: I don't care how bad your kids are, how rebellious or sinful, if there is a praying father or mother who daily pleads before the throne of God, God is going to hear that prayer. So hang in there! Continue to pray without ceasing and trust in God's grace. Let me tell you why.

The only thing I ever inherited from my father was a small gold ring with a little bit of black on it and a tiny diamond in the middle. I used to wear it until it got too tight for me, and so I took it off and put it away. One night while my wife and I were out at a meeting, our house was broken into and the only earthly thing I inherited from my father, the gold ring, was stolen. But something much more valuable, something that also came from my father, was still with me. Let me explain. You see, I grew up to be the kind of kid my mother didn't want me to play with. I remember an incident that happened in maybe the last year of the war when my mother had managed to get some ground beef somehow. This was unheard of because you couldn't buy beef anywhere. You couldn't buy eggs or butter because the Germans had taken everything for their war machine. But she got maybe a pound or a pound and a half and made a meatloaf. I can still see it sitting in a round ball high up on the shelf. I came into the house and I could smell the aroma of that delicious meatloaf everywhere. I was maybe eight years old at the time. I don't know what came over me, but I had that natural bias to evil I spoke about earlier, and I found it easier to do wrong than to do right.

I remember dragging a chair to the front of the kitchen cabinet and I stood up there and took down the plate. I took the meatloaf off the plate and I ate a ring around it. Then I put it back. Now there were nine kids in the family, so Dad had to go through all nine asking, "O.K., who did it? You? How about you?" He stopped at me a real long time. You know, when my children were little and told lies, I always knew immediately because their facial expressions changed. One of my girls would blink when she lied. But when I was a kid, no way. I had a poker face and I could lie like a champ. As my father stood there studying my face, I looked him straight in the eye and said, "No. It wasn't me." He took me by the hand and said, "Com'on Bernie," and he took me upstairs to the bedroom. He knelt down at the bed and made me kneel with him; then he put his arm around me and he said, "Dear Lord, I thank you that Bernhard didn't do it." And I said, "Amen, Lord!"

Twenty years later I said, "Dad, remember that meatball incident?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You know Dad, I did it." and he replied, "Yes, I knew it." All I was left in the way of earthly wealth was a little gold ring which was stolen. But my father gave me an inheritance that all the wealth in the world couldn't buy. And any of you fathers can make that kind of investment in your children. When you've gone to the Lord you can leave behind a living faith that will guide and protect your children in all circumstances. It's the kind of life insurance policy that pays out its dividends forever. And the premiums are very affordable.

Job purified his children; he sacrificed for them to present them blameless before God. What happens to a family under grace? God knows the father of that family, and in a single-parent family, God knows the mother because these parents have been praying and interceding for their children. God asked, "Have you seen my servant Job? There is no other like him." Why was Job special in God's eyes? Because he consistently, fervently, and ceaselessly prayed for his children and did what was pleasing in the sight of God. Although things may seem to go wrong, humanly speaking, God's grace will always rest on a family that remains faithful to him. That grace doesn't necessarily mean that trials will pass us by, but it does mean that we will benefit from those trials; we will be able to glorify God through those trials; and we will be strengthened and comforted in those trials.

Remember Job's friends came to him to comfort him in his time of trial by asking him to confess his faults before God, because they believed that the only possible reason for his afflictions could be his sinfulness. How short-sighted and unfaithful of them! I remember my dad sent me a letter when I was in England that I could hardly read. He told me he'd been having some pains and it seemed as if he'd had a heart attack but he thought that just couldn't be. Nonetheless, he was going to the hospital and he was praying that he would have a room with double occupancy so that someone next to him could hear his story of salvation. Most of us would prefer a room to ourselves, but Dad wanted someone with whom to share his faith. He went to the room expecting to find someone else and he wasn't disappointed. My father led him to the Lord. Surprisingly, when my father was examined afterward, the doctors could find nothing wrong and sent him home. A week later I got another letter from my father in good solid handwriting as always. God just needed him in that hospital room on that day at that time. What an inheritance! The example of a father always willing to use his circumstances to serve the Lord, always making himself available. Sometimes things go wrong, humanly speaking, but in God's plan for our lives they're really not wrong at all!

I cannot think of any greater disaster than what happened to Job and his family, and yet in the end nothing went wrong! Everything went according to God's will and purposes. The Bible tells us, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom.8:28) When you turn to the last page in the Book of Job you will find that everything that was taken from Job was restored to him, and in fact everything was restored twofold. Even his children were doubled. Though you read that he had ten children at the beginning of the Book, and he still had only ten children at the end of the Book, yet everything was doubled including his children because Job was a praying father who offered up sacrifices to the Lord for his children daily, lest they offend God in their hearts. Although his first ten children were taken away, he never lost them. They were waiting in heaven for him, preserved and ready to meet him. He had ten children in heaven, and ten additional children on earth. Although Satan had left Job's wife alive to tempt him, yet God used her to restore Job's children to him, blessing her for Job's sake. That, my friends, is a family under grace.

Weigh your relationship with Jesus Christ carefully. Is your own family a family under grace? Is it a nurturing family and a supportive family? Have you any handles of fear that Satan can take hold of and use to attack you, or have you truly placed your trust in Christ? Take Job as an example of a family leader and cultivate a living relationship with the Lord Almighty daily. Make a sacrifice of praise and prayer for your children and your spouse daily. If we all do that, then God will also say of us, "Have you seen my servants? They are blameless and upright, a people who fear God and shun evil." Amen? Amen!

Chapter 4

“Family Feud”

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

(Gen.37:2-4)

Why things go Wrong

Can you imagine what this family must have been like? Hatred, jealousy, intrigue and favoritism within a family of God? Why do things go wrong in our families? Why do we bicker and demean each other? Why do we hold onto resentment, or at times fail to show the same care for a family member that we would willingly show for a stranger? Well, first of all, things go wrong in our families when we refuse to acknowledge our sinfulness, our tendency to do what is contrary to the will of God; thus we fall into one of Satan’s most common traps of blissful ignorance. I’ve spent the last three chapters pounding out the inescapable fact that it is easier for us to do wrong than to do right and this is especially so when we refuse to acknowledge sin’s existence in our lives. It is the natural tendency for people of all ages to go the wrong way, and this is true whether or not they have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. We must be aware of our weaknesses as well as our strengths if we are to be effective servants of Christ and productive witnesses for him.

The second reason things go wrong in our families is that we often create situations in them that leave time-bombs ticking away, natural disasters that remain hidden from our view until it’s too late to escape from them. And this is what I particularly want to deal with in this chapter. We have already explored the threat to the family from the outside world, and the threat to the family posed by our own ignorance of sin. But there are also things we do to ourselves, and do to our loved ones, that undercut our chance to enjoy a fulfilling family life. What kind of things are we talking about?

Let’s look at an original soap opera which was recorded in the Bible for our instruction and guidance. Take a moment now to read Genesis 25:19-31:21. It is the story of Jacob, who was later to be named Israel. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, and the son of Isaac. His older brother was Esau. Jacob was a schemer, a cheat, a momma’s boy, a goody two-shoes. He was therefore insecure, unstable, and selfish. We know that he took advantage of a situation with his brother Esau to steal his brother’s birthright and the blessings that came with it. Esau had been making a joke about how hungry he was and how he would simply die if he couldn’t have some of Jacob’s stew. Jacob demanded an exchange for the stew, a birthright for a meal. For sport, Esau agreed to the outrageous bargain, and sealed it with an oath. Esau may have made his vow in jest, but Jacob was very serious about wanting it. In fact, later on Jacob joined with his mother in another scheme to deceive the ailing and blind Isaac, and to steal from his lips the blessings rightly due to Esau. I suppose in his own mind Jacob felt justified in taking the blessings which accompanied the birthright because of Esau’s indifference toward his inheritance. Besides, hadn’t God promised Jacob’s mother that the older would serve the younger?

And so because of Jacob's deviousness, selfishness and impatience, Esau was left with neither an inheritance nor a fatherly blessing. He despised his birthright and he lost it accordingly. He swore a frivolous oath and he suffered the consequences. It can be no different for us who are in Christ Jesus today. When we are disobedient we are in fact despising our birthright. When we continue in our old ways we make our oath of submission to Christ's Lordship a frivolous oath. We need to examine ourselves daily. We need to submit ourselves to the penetrating gaze of the Holy Spirit. He convicts us of our sin through the working of God's Word in our hearts and minds. If we avoid God's Word then we are really trying to run from God. That's a hopeless flight. We can never run from God. We can only run to him. Jacob found that out at an early age.

Jacob was using deceit to acquire the blessings which had already been promised by the Lord Almighty. Where was Jacob's faith in God's providence? Where was his patience, his willingness to wait on the Lord? How was he honoring his father in all this? The great Baptist preacher Spurgeon was once asked why God hated Esau so much; Spurgeon quickly replied, "What I can't understand is why God ever loved Jacob." Let me guarantee that Jacob would not have been a member of my congregation as he was then. And yet God says, "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated." (Rom.9:13) You see, God would teach Jacob faith, patience and respect in his own time, using his own patented process of perfecting through trial, and strengthening through adversity. Through God's chosen course of instruction Jacob would become his true and faithful servant. For this reason no finer example can be found of God's calling, election and grace than the life of Jacob. Jacob was no more deserving of God's grace than Esau, and that's precisely what makes God's grace so precious: it is undeserved favor. It is not something you can brag about; rather it is a humbling gift of God.

But to return to Jacob's problem with Esau, Jacob had to leave his home and flee for his life because Esau had found out about the deceit which had cost him his blessing and he was ready to kill Jacob. Jacob was not only afraid of his brother, but at this point he was a young man very much afraid of God. As he was fleeing to his uncle's home for refuge, he came to a place along the way where he might rest for the night. Exhausted, he laid his head on a rock to sleep and in a dream Jacob saw an angel ascending and descending from heaven. In the morning he recalled the dream and named that place "Bethel," which means place of God. It was here that he made his commitment to God; it was here that he gave control of his life to God. He said, "from now on I will give a tenth of all I receive." (Gen.28:20-22) It was a pledge and a covenant that changed the course of his life forever, but the change was not overnight. Although he now wants to do the will of God, no sooner does he arrive in his uncle's land than he spots a beautiful girl named Rachel and kisses her simply because she's pretty and he feels like it.

Confusing Lust with Love

Now let me tell you, you don't do that in the Middle East. The last time I was in Egypt to preach, I arrived at the Cairo airport and was met by all these bearded, sweaty men who had been waiting for me. It was about two o'clock in the morning and it was so hot and as soon as they saw me they raised their hands and ran to me and kissed me, first on one cheek, and then on the other. And I had to return each kiss, first on the one sweaty cheek, and then on the other. But their wives, who were much nicer looking than these guys, just stood there and shook me by the hand and said, "Oh hello Pastor Kuiper." You can kiss the men as a greeting there, but you simply don't go around kissing women in the Middle East. You don't even look at them or their family will consider it a marriage proposal or worse.

So here is Jacob impetuously kissing this young woman he had just met, oblivious to what he has obligated himself to. That was his first mistake. And then he makes his second mistake by listening to the advice of the girl's father, Laban, on what to do to make amends. He had fled to his uncle for refuge instead of fleeing to God and now he was learning the hard way that you must place your faith in God alone, and not in men. When you place your faith in men or bind yourself to them, you will always be disappointed in them. And you will also subject yourself to an unwanted relationship that may hinder your service to Christ. Jacob got caught in an unwanted relationship by doing what was required by the custom of the country instead of doing what was required by God.

Let me warn you, whatever you hear the world saying about family, about child discipline, about marriage, about sex, about love, or about anything else, you do exactly the opposite and you will be doing what is Biblical. In other words, what you read in the Bible is exactly the opposite of what the world is saying. The world will tell you to seek the advice and consent of other men, to trust in the laws and traditions of fellow creatures. But I'm telling you, you will find no refuge in the arms of other men nor in the might of nations, but only in the arms of God the Creator and in the might of his righteous right hand.

Jacob had committed his life to God, and yet he was listening to his uncle and following the customs of his uncle's country. He paid the price for the bad advice he received and for the false encouragement that his uncle's traditions offered him. Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, seven long years in which to learn patience, humility and submission. And then hoping to be with his new bride, he received a veiled young woman into his dim, candle-lit chamber, only to wake up in the morning and discover it had really been Leah and not Rachel for whom he had worked so hard.

The Bible says Leah was "weak-eyed," which means she was probably cross-eyed; I suppose she could look around corners without turning her head. Yet inwardly she was a precious woman, and I truly mean precious; here she was with this young man who had committed himself to God, united in marriage to him under what I would like to call "Plan A" of God. Jacob was so mad with this deceit played upon HIM this time by Rachel's father, that a week later he agreed to work another seven years if he could also be married to Rachel. Jacob should have loved Leah from the start, recognizing her precious nature and the providence of God in the circumstances. It seems to me that toward the end of his life Jacob did realize just how fine a woman Leah was, because she was buried in the tomb of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while Rachel died somewhere on the road and was buried there.

Rachel was vain, selfish, arrogant, clutching and naggish. For all her outward beauty, she failed to show any beauty of character. By contrast, Leah may not have been a very pretty woman outwardly, but in character she was a treasure. Jacob was caught in a trap by listening to worldly advice and by seeking things highly valued by the world but not by God. Wealth and beauty are short-lived; they can be taken away from you and their value fades with time; but the things of God are eternal and irrevocable and priceless.

Within Jacob's family were six boys and one girl from Leah, but from Rachel no children at all. Being envious of Leah, Rachel came up with a great idea (which no doubt also followed the custom of that land). She gave her handmaiden to Jacob so that he might have offspring that Rachel could call her own. So Jacob had two children by the handmaiden of Rachel. Now Leah became jealous and offered her own handmaiden to Jacob and again two children were born of

that union. Finally Rachel had her own two children and the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel were then complete. And did they live happily ever after? Don't you believe it! Can you imagine this? Six children from the ugly mother, two children from his favorite wife, two from one servant woman and two from another; and Rachel ran the house.

We know this because of what happened later on to Reuben, the oldest son of Jacob. He found some pomegranates, symbols of fruitfulness, and when Rachel saw them she demanded to have some. Reuben refused and ran to his mother. Leah confronted Rachel and said, "Wasn't it enough for you to steal my husband? Now you want to steal my son's fruit." Rachel answered, "If you let me have some of your son's fruit, you can sleep with Jacob tonight." So you can see that Rachel was in charge of all the sleeping arrangements. If she controlled that aspect of Jacob's life, then she probably controlled everything else that went on in his household.

This is quite a family. We see here what proves to be a built-in time bomb in the family relationships. God made Eve for Adam's companion. He didn't make Eve 1, 2, 3 and 4. The custom of the land was polygamy, a mere tradition of mortal men; it undermined the design for the marriage union which God established with Adam and intended for man's benefit. Any time we substitute our own solutions and designs for those of God we are bound to suffer the consequences of a wrong decision. It is out and out rebellion against God. Jacob was enticed into rebellion and his family was paying the consequences for departing from God's plan.

The Sins of the Fathers

Jacob further reflects the flawed and sinful nature which he inherited by returning evil for evil rather than good for evil. When Jacob was shortchanged by Laban, he exacted his revenge by cheating his father-in-law out of his cattle, his sheep, his goats and his other possessions until Jacob, the servant of Laban, was richer than Laban himself. Even as a father Jacob's actions departed from God's plan for his life. He still sought favored treatment within his family; he sought favor for himself when he was a boy, and now he bestowed favor on his own son Joseph. All his other sons had to go out to work in the fields, but Joseph was permitted to escape such rigorous demands and instead he was used to bring back reports on the other sons, as if they were hired hands. Joseph aggravated the situation with his wonderful dreams. He didn't keep them to himself, but flaunted them in front of his family to let them know that he would be favored by God and placed above them. That was an attitude he had been taught by Jacob.

For every action there is a reaction. Jacob was planting the seeds of his own sin in the life of his son. The family didn't say the dreams were nonsense; they understood completely what had been revealed to Joseph; they flatly opposed it and they revealed their rebellion against God when they did. Perhaps they thought Joseph made up the dreams, but if they believed that the dreams were from God, then they placed themselves in opposition to God's Will. And the consequences to their family of such rebellion included family rivalry, jealousy, hatred, attempted murder, lies, guilt, fear and hypocrisy. They were a family only in the sense that they were united in rebellion. They taught each other. They learned from each other. They enticed each other. They condemned each other. This then, in short order, was the first soap opera as recorded in the Bible. It was certainly a mess.

Some might say to me, "That's all well and good for ancient history, but we're different now." **Don't you believe it!** Anytime you decide to oppose God's will, the consequences are going to be the same. Let me give you a typical example of what you can find in approximately five

million households (or house-let-goes) in America. Consider a home with a woman who has just been divorced; three young girls live with her aged eight, ten and twelve. She meets a man, also just divorced, who has three boys aged eight, ten and twelve. They “fall in love” as our society likes to describe it. Love is NOT something you just fall into. Infatuation you fall into. Love is something that takes hard work. Love is dying to yourself for the benefit of somebody else. And if there is love in a marriage the marriage will never break up. If there is merely lust or infatuation, the marriage will wear out in no time.

In the example I am presenting here we have a situation similar to that of Jacob, only it is worse. It is worse because we have three girls who have been provoked to anger by the loss of their father’s company in the home; though they want to be with both parents, a judge has ordered them to go with their mother. They have been abused by the emotional trauma of the divorce. Divorce ranks second only to abortion in the way it abuses a young girl. And the typical girls from these broken homes are both insecure and undisciplined. The same can be said of the boys.

The two adults in this statistical scenario then marry each other for the same reasons that led them into their first marriages; and the same reasons for the failure of those previous marriages have also been built into their new relationship with each other. Like so many marriages today, theirs has been built on the “three F’s” of a failing marriage: face, figure, and finances. Baseless marriages don’t last. Having very little to bond them together, the couple decides to make things better between them by “cementing the relationship;” they have a child together so they will have “his, hers and theirs.” This child is of course younger than all the others, so the brand new baby receives all the attention which infuriates and frustrates all the other children. Is it reasonable to expect them to live happily ever after? The way divorce and remarriage has been popularized in TV shows like the “Brady Bunch,” one would think so. They really should have called that show the “Greedy Bunch;” it’s a situation comedy where everyone is trying to get his own way while everyone else tries to foil his plans. It’s selfishness running wild.

Marital Bonds as Social Bonds

In real life remarriage just doesn’t work to keep a family whole and loving. It’s a setup for disaster worse than Jacob’s because the kids are angry and not merely jealous. The visitation rights of the “deposed” parent eat away at the relationship of the custodial parent with the kids so that the children are torn between the two warring parents, and sometimes even fearful of losing them both. One of two things happens at that point: either the children withdraw for emotional protection as if to say, “no love ventured, no love lost,” or they cling to the parent they are with at the time so they’ll at least have someone. That sends misleading messages to the parent they are with, making the parent believe that the child would really prefer to be with him or her rather than the other parent. This is what leads to the child kidnappings and the frequently false accusations of child abuse against the other parent. If either of the two parents has now become a Christian, then the problem of visiting rights or custodial privileges with a non-Christian is raised. The child is torn between two belief systems as well as two parents. Practical problems of where to have Christmas dinner and all the other complications you can think of overwhelm the family’s stability and its sanity.

After a little while, the man of our statistical scenario discovers that his second wife is no better than his first. And she discovers that his “sweet boys” are nasty, spoiled, filthy-minded, insubordinate juvenile delinquents. Is it any wonder things go bad?! And that’s why more

second-marriages break up than stay together. Let's look at the reasons for these break-ups from a Biblical point of view.

Three Causes of Divorce

1. There is a failure to understand the very nature, essence, and purpose of marriage.

Marriage cannot be understood until it has been put together in a Christian framework and a Christian atmosphere. In the Christian atmosphere, with the Word of God as the basis of the marriage, the man can truly be said to have left his father and mother and become one with his bride (Gen.2:24). Husband and wife are united in their submission to the Lordship of Christ. Outside of the Christian atmosphere, the two remain separate in their goals, their attitudes and their expectations and this later leads to the friction that will tear the marriage apart.

2. There is lack of personal discipline. You'd be amazed how many people get married who have no understanding of the discipline and hard work that is required to make a success of the marriage. They have "fallen in love" and that mushy feeling that they have for each other is thought to be enough to make a successful bond. That may be one reason why marriages that have been put together by parents in other countries tend to succeed where ours fail, despite the fact that their children may never have met each other face to face but have merely corresponded with one another over a period of time. The children who are pledged in this way are forced to build their relationship on a real foundation, on something other than infatuation, fantasy, or sexual attraction. In marriage there are practical problems of adjusting lifestyles to one another which require give and take, sacrifice and forgiveness. Where are such attributes to come from if we have led a life of self-indulgence? Love is giving of oneself for the well-being of another. Love is not a feeling that must be satisfied. Love is an activity that must be unselfishly rendered.

3. Believe it or not, the third biggest reason for divorce is interference from in-laws. When the minister asks, "Who gives this bride away?" and the father steps forward to give the bride away, this is not in the ceremony to make it last another few minutes. Nor is it there as some meaningless tradition that we hold onto for nostalgic reasons. It is there because it is a Divine Principle laid down in Scripture for the benefit of God's children. The father had better mean it when he answers, "I do" because if he doesn't, he will very likely ruin the marriage of his daughter. I get so frustrated and burdened when people do so many dumb things because they refuse to listen to what the Word of God says. Some people have come to my church for years without hearing a thing I've proclaimed from the pulpit; they come rebellious in spirit, and then depart still going their own ungodly way, "falling in lust" with someone rather than uniting in love with them.

External Interference

There is another problem that sometimes arises in a family between two sets of grandparents who are unequally situated economically. It's as if the richer of the two tries to purchase the love of their grandchildren or even of their own child at the expense of the parents' relationships with each other, with the children, and with the other set of grandparents. Perhaps the wealthy grandparents take the grandchildren to Disneyland or to Europe. But the poor grandparents only have enough to send a little doll every now and then. Who are the little kids going to love more? The wealthier ones who pamper them. A woman in a church I pastored in Atlanta came to me one time and said, "I'm so concerned! What am I going to do?" She had married an Air Force pilot some time before, who had gone to Vietnam and been killed there in the war. Her child was

born and she was already a widow. The grandfather of the little boy was very wealthy and spoiled the boy constantly. At the time the woman had come to see me the boy had grown to age fourteen or so and the grandfather now wanted to buy him a Ferrari! She had another son by her new husband, and that boy never got anything from the grandfather. I said to her, "Tell your father-in-law to give the Ferrari to me!" No. I suggested that she find out from her parents how much they could afford to give and then tell her in-laws that they were limited to that amount. Imagine the pressure of former in-laws in that situation, and how difficult it is for the parent to avoid conflict and hurt feelings.

Confusion of Roles

The final problem for our families that I want to discuss in this context comes from the influence of the world: how we permit it to infiltrate our homes and set ourselves up for a fall when we do. Women's Lib is the issue I want to use as an example. I used to joke about it and call it "Women's Lip." But it's no longer a lip movement. They are organized and smart in their approach to social change. Women's Lib is a tool of Satan that is being used to destroy the lives of millions of women. I am FOR women's liberation. I am FOR equal pay for equal work. I want women to be free. I want women to be honored. But most of all I want a woman to be a woman of God. I don't want humanists and Satanists parading their philosophies in front of me under the guise of equal rights, nor do I want my opposition to their philosophies portrayed as opposition to equal rights.

The worst danger confronting this nation, after our own personal sin is taken into account, is that horrible confusion of roles which has proceeded from the women's liberation movement; and that danger is followed closely by the immorality or amorality which has also been associated with the movement. Once the roles have been set aside, morality becomes a relative thing. Almost any code of behavior or dress, or any other standard of social or economic acceptability can be attacked as having been derived from sexual biases rather than having been derived either from God's plan for us, or from "rational necessity," whatever that means. Liberation from social constraints leads to an endless pursuit of personal preferences. It's nothing more than self-worship, and it's nothing less than a setup for disaster. When people cry out, "Heaven help the home!" they have properly addressed their cry to God, because his solution is the only solution that will protect the family from the decaying corpse of a godless society.

Let's take a look at Ephesians, the 5th chapter. It contains a recipe for success in marriage. It isn't an easy recipe to follow, but it works, and it works before you get to the point of divorce or separation. It applies as much to your relationships outside of marriage as it does to your family relationships. It is a call to a Christian walk, a walk taken in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, a walk taken humbly, lovingly, forgivingly and sacrificially.

First of all, to be successful in marriage you have to be an imitator of Christ and not of the world. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."(v.1) So to have success, you don't have to BE somebody in the sense of seeking self-importance and personal success; rather you have to be LIKE somebody. And the somebody you have to be like has already shown you the way to imitate him. This is explained more fully in Philippians, the 2nd chapter, verses 3-8.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!”

Selfishness in the Marriage

What is your position in your family like? Do you always want your own way? Do you feel defensive all the time and strike out at your loved ones to protect your position and authority? Do you play the martyr to get your own way or to gain the sympathy of your family? Do you try to manipulate your family into doing what YOU want, or do you instead try to minister to them, to meet THEIR needs more than your own? Consider what you say and do every day and correct yourself against Christ’s example. Are you the servant or the tyrant in your home? Do you seek the favor of your family more than the favor of God? Do you try to change your family more than love them? Do you demand to be loved by them before you will love them in return? These are not the attitudes of a servant nor do they reflect a Christ-like love. Get on your knees in prayer and ask God’s forgiveness because it is God you have offended. Pray for strength, wisdom and self-control. Step out in faith and love the family God has provided you without expecting anything in return. God will honor your obedience to his word. He will enrich your family life and increase both the love you share and the love you receive. Imitate the Lord.

Secondly, you have to beware of deceivers. “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”(v.6-7) Millions of women have been deceived by men who love them with empty words. That is why they turn to the Women’s Lib movement, social clubs, afternoon tennis and anything else that will give them a sense of worth and value. Love is never having to say ‘I love you,’ or at least not leaving it at that. Love is not an empty word given with the lips alone. Love is given with your whole life. We cannot expect to be loved simply by hearing ‘I love you,’ but we can expect to feel loved by deeds which display love in action(1Jn.3:18). It is because women have not been loved in action and in truth that they feel short-changed and angry and turn to a liberation movement to demand that they receive loving treatment. But that movement is filled with more empty words, more frustration, and more disappointment for them. “A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn.13:34) Don’t be deceived by cheap imitations that come wrapped in pretty packages of empty words.

Personal Walk with God

Thirdly, remember who you were before you were washed in Blood of Christ, and what you were saved from. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” (v.8,11) Esau forgot who he was and what awaited him for an inheritance. Jacob forgot who he was and sought those things which the world values but which God despises. Consider seriously whose child you are and how you can bring honor and glory to your heavenly family as you bring honor and glory to your earthly family. Your worth to your family can only be found

in your worth to God. We all need to feel loved and to feel significant in the eyes of others. But in Christ Jesus we ARE loved and we ARE significant. That meets all our needs. Feeling loved and feeling significant is cream on top. And the best way to gain those feelings is by being obedient to the Word of God. Act on it. Act like you ARE a child of God rather than acting like you want to BECOME a child of God. When you first uttered the words that brought Jesus Christ into your life you became a child of God, past tense. It's a fact. Discover it. Live it. Rejoice in it! But also remember who you were and put away the things of the past.

Using Scripture as a Marital Handbook

Fourthly, consider the wisdom, words and worship of the Christian. "Be very careful then how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Jacob was unwise when he rejected Leah. He needed to be taught wisdom over a period of many years. Be wise NOW! "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (v.17) Take the wisdom contained in Proverbs and begin to act it out in your life. Take the wisdom contained in the Old Testament and see how it has been fulfilled in the New. Take the wisdom contained in the words of Christ and apply it to what you say and do during the day. "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me." (Jn.6:45) Take the wisdom contained in Paul's letters and fall down in worship and in praise for the great wonders which the Lord has wrought in your life. Before the world was created, your life in Christ was foreordained to the glory of God Almighty. Keep that fact before you every minute of the day. Memorize God's Word so that you will take it to heart. Try these verses right now:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Prov.9:10)

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Josh.1:8)

Consider your family life very seriously; how you live within the four walls of your house cannot be substantially different from how you live outside those walls. If you are content and fulfilled within those walls you will be content and fulfilled outside those walls. Living according to God's plan is the only way to be content and fulfilled wherever you are. Study his plan. Then begin to implement it with the things you say to your family. Build each other up in the Lord by saying things which are uplifting, hope-inspiring, courage-instilling, love-inducing. Minister to your family as you would minister to a stranger in need: sacrificially, benevolently, and unconditionally. Make the most of every opportunity to share your love with your family in practical and tangible ways; serving them is the most practical and tangible way there is. Stop before you speak and consider whether what you are about to say is designed to help a loved one, or to help yourself by getting them to do what you expect them to do. The first is a ministry. The second is a manipulation. How we behave is in fact part of our spiritual worship. Consider the wisdom, words and worship of the Christian.

Fifthly, in verses 21-24 we see the privilege, the pleasure and the potential of Christian marriage. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ... Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord..." We do not serve a spouse because of what we hope to get back from him or her. We serve a spouse because of what we know we have already received from Jesus Christ. If what we feel about ourselves depends on what our spouses do or say to us, then we haven't the strength or the resources to serve anyone. If what we feel about ourselves depends on our spouses, then we

will rise and fall with our spouse's moods, and then we will fail to offer them the forgiveness and the patience of Christ. Our family life will become a life of bitter ups and downs. We will hold onto our resentments reciting a whole catalog of old offenses each and every time our spouse commits a "crime" against us. If we serve each other because of what we hope to get out of it, then we do no service at all and what we do will stand or fall on a reaction we get from a frail human being just like ourselves.

Depending on Christ, not our Spouse

But if we serve because of our reverence for Christ, then the reaction of a spouse, good or bad, will have no diminishing effect on us. We will not be vulnerable. We will not be weak. We will not be threatened. We will be complete in Christ. We will feel satisfied because we have done what is good and pleasing in the sight of God. Wives should submit to their husbands in everything, but they must submit first to Christ. They cannot use this portion of Scripture to justify disobedience to the Lord, simply because they have disobedient husbands. If the husband refuses to attend church, the wife is not excused from the fellowship of the Body just to be submissive to the husband. Rather she is obligated to demonstrate by her own example the benefits of the Christian life in such a way as to win her husband to obedience. She cannot nag him into attendance nor demean him in front of the children or friends. Her submissiveness does not condone the actions of her husband. Rather her submissiveness affirms the faith she has placed in Jesus Christ. These are the privileges, the pleasures and the potentials that are contained in a Christian marriage.

Finally, in verses 25-33 we find the key to a holy, happy household. "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Too many husbands demand the submissiveness of the wife without picking up their half of the marital responsibilities. They are not sacrificial in the way they behave towards the wife. They try instead to lord it over the wife. The wife is not a bondservant of the husband. She is not there to build the husband's ego, to cook his dinners and wash his clothes. She is there to be his God-appointed companion and to serve Jesus Christ through that role. The husband is not there to provide a paycheck for the wife to spend, nor to mow the lawn and fix the car. He is there to be his wife's God-appointed companion and to serve Jesus Christ through that role. But between the two there must be assigned responsibilities and God has provided for the husband to be the head of the family, not the wife. He holds that position for a reason, and that reason is to provide for the welfare of the wife.

As long as both husband and wife are giving of themselves for the benefit of the other, the marriage can only gain in strength and security. But as soon as one or the other becomes a taker the marriage is headed for disaster. That same rule applies to parent-child relationships and to sibling relationships. To be a giving family member, you have to be a loving family member, a serving family member, a humble family member, and a Christ-honoring family member. That is the key to a holy and happy marriage. Holiness is a quality of being set aside for God's use and purposes. Holy matrimony, therefore, is a marriage which has Jesus Christ as its author, its head, and its fulfillment.

May God's grace and peace be upon the family, and especially the Christian family in America and around the world.

Chapter 5

“The Family Under Discipline.”

The family under discipline means the family as God intended it to be and the family as it needs to be trained. I suppose some of the most damaging advice given to families in recent decades has been in the realm of child discipline. There have been a myriad of books printed about family life and children in the past few years, and most have concerned discipline or the lack of it. And yet never before have we seen such mishandling of child discipline, never before have we seen so many misconceptions about it, nor have so many mistakes been made trying to apply it. People have resorted to all kinds of books for guidance, but they seem to have forgotten about THE Book that deals with child discipline: God’s loving Word to us. The Bible is God’s handbook for developing a successful family life; it contains sound and practical advice that has been kept intact for us through all the generations of mankind. I believe if there is one major area in which Satan has scored some points against us, it would have to be family discipline: our failure to consult God’s word for guidance and to raise up our children in the fear, discipline and instruction of the Lord. Here we are not guilty of a sin of commission (doing something that God has forbidden); rather most of us are guilty of a sin of omission (failing to do something that God has commanded). He has commanded us to raise our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and that is hard work.

Honoring Parents

The Bible tells us that children are to honor their parents. That is a direct command from God and he has included it with his other commandments not to murder or steal. God considers it as crucial to our well-being as any other of the 10 commandments and its violation has the same consequences as the others: we become separated from God. So the moment a child dishonors a parent by ignoring instruction, talking back, being insubordinate, etc. that child is sinning against a righteous and holy God. David confessed his sin with Bathsheba saying, “Against you only have I sinned Oh Lord.” (Ps.51:4) And thus parents must ensure that their little ones realize this vital point: that we do not sin against other people and we do not sin against parents, but we sin against a holy God. Sins against God within the family setting need to be severely punished. The child must be reprimanded to instill a proper understanding of the nature of sin, the character of God, and the respect that God says should be accorded to the parent and to the family. “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Ephesians 6:4 tells fathers, “do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” These are parental responsibilities that cannot be treated lightly.

As we examine the family under discipline we find that there are four common ways of handling a child, and then there is one very uncommon way of handling a child. The first of the common ways is hinted at by a widely used bumper sticker that reads, “Have you hugged your kids today?” The second way might be hinted at by paraphrasing it, “Have you slugged your kids today?” The third by, “Have you bugged your kids today?” and the fourth by, “Have you nagged your kids today?” The final uncommon way of handling a child would be worded, “Have you loved your child today?” Let’s examine each of these ways of handling children so we can better appreciate what Godly love should look like in the context of the Family.

Loving our Children Firmly

Method One - Have You Hugged Your Kids Today?

This is a very legitimate question to ask ourselves. Hugging our kids is something that's vital to their well-being. They must know from positive physical contact that they are truly loved and not loved just with words. No doubt it occurred to the creator of the bumper sticker that kids weren't being hugged enough and maybe that's true. I remember being at the home of an English minister for two weeks with an evangelistic team, and he had a little 18 month old child whom God had provided late in life. Both parents were unused to and perhaps incapable of hugging and loving this beautiful little girl. She would get her bottle and then the parents would put her on a mat in the center of this huge English mansion. During the whole two weeks we were there we did not see the little one picked up or hugged or played with or loved. We didn't want to do it in front of them for fear of showing them up so we would take turns distracting the parents off in another room while someone else on the team rolled around on the floor with the baby. When we left of course the little one cried.

The baby's bottle is a very poor substitute for mother's hugs. And if for some unusual reason you have to bottle-feed your little one, NEVER prop up the little one on pillows and cushions and let him fend for himself. Immediately the child will miss out on something that is very important for its emotional development: to be held and to be loved and to feel the very heartbeat of mother and father. I had a boy tell me once that he could not remember his father ever hugging him. When Elizabeth, my second-eldest daughter was in high school in Atlanta, I attended a function where she saw me and she ran up to me and, not having seen her for a whole two hours, I hugged and kissed her. One of her girl-friends was appalled and said, "You kissed your father! Yeech!" She obviously was not in the habit of kissing her father. So my daughter went around asking her other friends how many had never kissed their father and half of them never did! It's amazing how much a little hugging and kissing can do to make a child feel loved, wanted, secure and complete. It's important to show affection to your children and I don't want to play it down.

But hugging your children is not the only thing you are supposed to be doing for your children. Hugging isn't a cure-all; it doesn't fix everything. That is why I couldn't have a bumper sticker with this phrase on the back of my car. It kind of teaches that if I've hugged my kids then I've met my responsibilities for them for the whole day. Well I haven't. There are times when hugging my kids is not only inappropriate but in fact it might be completely wrong, and this is generally when there should be corrective discipline. A hug does not cover up a multitude of sins. Love does. But love may mean employing corrective discipline rather than affectionate hugging. This was a lesson that Eli failed to learn in dealing with his two rebellious sons (1Sam.1-2), and because he failed to discipline his children, they were cursed by God. I'll return to Eli a little bit later. Hugging is good, but it is not the only answer to how to properly handle a child.

Method Two - Have You Slugged Your Kids Today?

Do you know what slugging your kids is? It's hitting them out of anger. You'd be amazed to learn that most discipline, i.e. punishment for not obeying a parent, goes on when the parent loses his or her temper. This is wrong. It is the basis for most child abuse. The parent has been lenient and inconsistent in disciplining the child and then finds himself repeatedly threatening the child with punishment. You know the threat: "One more time kid and you're gonna get it." And the next time comes and the threat gets repeated, "Now that's two times I've warned you. Once

more and you're gonna get it." And then of course the child is going to try once more because he knows the parent can't be trusted to make good on the threat and it continues until the parent finally blows up in a fit of rage and does damage to the child. Scripture forbids it.

Slugging can also be the constant hitting of a child with no purpose in mind. It's never enough to really hurt the child, and it never quite gets a message across to the child; it just goes on and on like some pesky fly that won't leave you alone. It's useless and really it's no discipline at all. The child never has a chance to learn and to grow in self-control because the parent is training the child to be without self-control. The control is coming from the parent instead. There is no respite from the hitting so there is no hope in the child that he will ever do something right and receive positive encouragement for his success. He only hears from the parent when he has done wrong. The rest of the time he meets with parental indifference.

He carries this over into his relationship with Christ and feels that there can never be any hope of fulfilling his duty as a Christian. He goes to God in prayer only when he has done something wrong. He sees every trial that God uses to prepare and strengthen him as some kind of punishment for his sinfulness. He feels worthless and defeated rather than fulfilled and victorious. Parents must mix punishment with affection sparingly but consistently. The child must learn that there are fixed limits to his behavior so that he can feel confident that he has not crossed over those limits. He can then take pride in the fact that he is good and that he has done what is right. He will have confidence in his own ability to exercise self-control and he will have confidence that any punishment he receives will be meted out fairly and justly.

You see, there is hitting or discipline that is given unfairly and it is more destructive than constructive. It happens when parents fail to understand the difference between childish behavior and insubordination. There are a lot of things that a child will do that are the result of his age, his awkwardness, his inexperience. Milk will be spilled. The glass will be broken. The table will be knocked. You cannot punish a child for something that is basically beyond his control. He has to feel secure in your presence. He has to know that forgiveness is available to him when he makes a mistake or he will grow up fearful and timid. God has provided his grace to each of us and we should provide that same kind of grace to our children so that they will carry over the lessons of their own family life to their life in the family of God. Mistakes are not rebellion. Accidents alone are not good cause for punishment. Refusing to heed the cautions of the parent, unwillingness to apply the teachings of the parent – these are a form of rebellion and these are proper causes for discipline; but the child's inability to succeed at these things should not in itself be cause for punishment. As parents we must learn to distinguish between childish behavior and willful insubordination.

Then there is hitting unwisely. A child can constantly be warned for example, "Don't touch that book. It's an antique Bible that your great-grandfather left behind. Don't play with it because it's brittle and old." But the child will touch it and the parent will warn him again. And again the child will touch it until it falls to the floor and the cover breaks. Then the child is punished. But why? What is the basis for the punishment? The child believes it is because the cover broke. That is merely inconvenient and costly. The child should rather have been told that he is receiving punishment for being insubordinate, for being disobedient. Then the lesson afforded by the punishment will carry over to other cautions that the parent gives at some point in the future. Less and less punishment will be needed as the child learns that the cautions are given to avoid breaking, damaging, and injuring things and people in general and not just that book or that glass in particular.

Timing is important for this. Punish after the first warning and not after some indefinite number of warnings or the child will be confused. Too often the child is not punished for his disobedience which came with the first offense, but for the consequences of his disobedience which came when the book finally split or the glass finally broke. He learns that he will not be punished unless something bad comes of his disobedience; in other words its O.K. to be disobedient as long as you're careful. As for the parent, punishment has been given not because the child has been disobedient, but because the child has done something which is merely inconvenient for the parent, like the spilled glass. That's what I mean by punishing unwisely. Be sure the child understands the reason for the punishment and be sure the reason for the punishment is correct.

Method Three - Have You Bugged Your Kids Today?

I quoted Ephesians earlier which instructs fathers not to exasperate their kids. Don't exasperate, don't "bug" your kids. There are many ways by which a parent can really exasperate his children. One we constantly hear in counseling sessions is, "My parents never listen to a word I say." The point is, as parents we've just got to accept the fact that there is never going to be a "good" time to listen to our kids, that is, a time when nothing else is going on and nothing more important is going to take precedence over talking to our kids. Face it. Kids never come to you when you've got an hour to spare. If we can accept that then we can learn to simply stop what we are doing in mid-stream, turn around and concentrate on what our kids are telling us. Not listening is exasperating to children. It makes them feel unimportant, rejected and foolish.

Another exasperation involves the use of a punishment known as grounding. The genius behind the use of the rod is this: it hurts ... A LOT. It takes only a short time to exact punishment, and there is an immediate cause and effect relationship that is perfectly clear to the child at the time the offense is committed. Once the punishment has been exacted, the slate is wiped clean and both the parent and the child can pray together, and hug and kiss and then go on about their business. If the child insists on crying for a long period of time afterwards then he must be punished again for trying to get back at you. You've got to be in control. What is happening in America is that parents are not in control. It is the kids who run the household. Kids are natural-born manipulators who will get away with as much as we allow.

And yet they really want to know what the rules of the game are; they want to know what is acceptable behavior and what is not acceptable. But the parents are leaving it up to the kids to determine the boundaries of acceptable behavior, and even to determine the extent of their own punishment. Where is the line drawn for a child between right and wrong when the penalty for disobedience is being sent to a room stocked with books, stereo, TV., and video games? We might as well not punish them at all. Parents stand helplessly by while 3/4 of a million teenagers are missing in an affluent society that has abandoned responsibility for them. They have run away to meet the world head-on, a world that at some point will say to them, "This is the point beyond which you may not go." Too many are finding out that abuse, addiction, prostitution, imprisonment and even death are what the real world holds in store for them when they step over the line. Is the rod really so bad in light of what awaits our children outside the protection of the family?

What has gone wrong is that too many parents are turning to this book and that book instead of turning to ***the Book***, which is God's loving Word. There are some people who say never lay a hand on your child because your child will turn around and hate you. That is not proved at all. If

anything we see contempt and disrespect in the eyes of a child whose parents don't care enough to give him firm limits. If you ground a child you drag out the punishment over a long period until the child can't even remember what it was he did wrong. He becomes frustrated and angry and may even say to you, "But I haven't done anything wrong in ages!" At what point are you kneeling down with your child and showing him your own grief over his behavior and then your clear forgiveness of him? Since when does God drag out his punishment when we sin? When does God say, "you've been bad and disobedient so I'm going to ground you for the next month?" He doesn't do it and it is His example that we are to follow. God punishes quickly and forgives instantly and we are then restored to fellowship with him.

What happens if during the period of the grounding the child commits another naughty act? Do we add grounding to grounding? When will it end? It's about as effective as imprisonment for an adult. I think it's worthless. The Bible says a criminal is to atone for his acts, to make amends, to repay the person for what has been stolen. That concept applies as well to our children who can atone for their own acts, and pay for the damaged things out of their own allowances. They can learn practical ways to demonstrate their repentance and feel good about it. God has provided a good and fair system of justice that we dare not ignore. It begins its application in the home and then it carries over into adult life and even society at large.

Grounding has no useful Biblical purpose. Worse yet, grounding frustrates the ministry of the church which is striving to implant the love of Christ and the discipline of God in the children's hearts and minds. The parents who employ grounding as punishment turn to the child and use the ministries of the church as a sword over the child's head: "If you're not good you can't go to the youth group gathering at Elitch Gardens or at Youth Camp because you'll be grounded." That's exactly what you shouldn't do. It's at these functions that the child will learn to be obedient. And to prevent them from attending church functions as a means of punishment carries the punishment over to other people who are not involved at all. You deny others the company of your child, the insights of your child, and you deny your child the company and insights of others who God has determined are crucial to raising up your child in the faith.

Parents do it because they know the child is looking forward to getting away with the other kids and the child is all excited about it and the parents want to hurt the child by denying it to them. That's revenge, not admonition. Why not put them on bread and water for a year? That will harm them just as much. It will deny them vital nutrients that they need to grow just as much as withholding the ministry of the church from them. DON'T exasperate your child. Punish them with the rod and get it over with so you can return to fellowship with them and they can return to fellowship with the world around them.

Method Four - Have You Nagged Your Kids Today?

This is probably the most common of the four ways of handling a child. It happens when we do nothing besides threatening our children. "If you... I'm gonna ..." Empty threats are meaningless. They are repeated over and over until the child just ignores them altogether. And if you finally follow through on one you will only breed contempt and resentment in your child because there is no reason why you should have punished this time when you failed to punish so many other times. It is unfair. A man asked a little boy three years old what his name was and the boy replied, "Shut-up!" The man was shocked and said, "Whoa! Wait a minute there; I was only asking what your name was..." The boy said again, "Shut-up!" The man finally reasoned that this little boy had been told so many times to shut up that he had begun to think that was his name!

That's what it is like for some of our own kids. All they hear is, "Stop it, cut it out, shut up, go away..." and one of these days they will go away, and perhaps not come back.

Nagging kids is addressed in Scripture. In 1 Samuel chapter two, Eli, the high priest, knew about the bad behavior of his sons and yet he failed to punish them for their great wickedness. The house of Eli was not punished by God because the sons were evil. God will not punish any parent for the sins of his children because in sin they were conceived and sinners they will be. The house of Eli was punished because Eli himself was at fault. Eli's sons desecrated the house of God, misused their offices for personal gain, defamed God's holy name and still Eli stood by with nothing more to say than, "Why do you do such things? ...It is not a good report that I hear..." The Bible says Eli's sons didn't listen to their father's rebuke and it's no wonder! Eli's rebuke, like his service to the Lord, was mere lip service. He nagged his sons with the fact that what they were doing was sinful but he never did anything to stop them.

That's the same advice so many parents today give to their own children. "That's not good children; you shouldn't be doing that." What God says is that you've got to stop them from doing it! In the very next chapter God says, "For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about. His sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them." It doesn't say he failed to talk to them about it. He failed to restrain them. And because of it Eli's household was cut off and no atonement could be made for them ever again.

It is our divinely assigned responsibility to put a stop to things. It is no good telling your children, "Please turn down that rock music." The horrible language, the satanic, immoral, atheistic, and homosexual ideas come banging through over and over again affecting your kids' view of themselves and of the world. The kids shouldn't be listening to it in the first place. Don't beg your kids; don't hound your kids; get a hammer and smash the thing. God wants you to be in control of your family and if it takes smashing a few records to get the point across then do it. It's not the records or your children's liking them that you will be judged for, but your failure to put an end to the influence they exert over your child and your failure to demand the obedience that is due you under Scripture.

Doing It God's Way - Have You Loved Your Kids Today?

How do you love your children? First of all, do what is commanded by God. There is a beautiful scene in Scripture where we read,

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become great and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time... So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth..." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

(Gen.6:5-8)

Despite the sins of the multitude, Noah was chosen out of them to provide the remnant for mankind. Noah was head of his household and God told him to bring his children into the ark, into that place of refuge, into the "church" of God, into his family of chosen ones. And that's why parents bring their little infants forward for baptism and say to God in faith, "God we lift up this little infant to you and know that very soon in life he will come to know the Lord Jesus." We say to Satan, "Hands off. This one has been brought into the ark of the covenant and set aside for God's purposes." We pledge ourselves as the covenant people of God to raise that little infant in the fear and admonition of the Lord. That's the church: it's a place of promise; a place of

protection; a place of life among death; a place where we have a plan for the chosen; a place of instruction and correction; a place where we find the ways and the will of God.

Raising Children in the Faith

Dedicate your child to God while the child is young! I cannot remember a time in my life when I did not know about God. I don't know how old I was when my parents gave me to the Lord. One thing I can remember as a little boy, and that is one Sunday night I was sitting on my mother's lap up front in the church; my father was up on the platform somewhere and I was getting sleepy and suddenly I fell off the chair. My father picked me up and carried me to the back where I sat on his lap. I was brought to be among the people of God at a very early age for the same reason you've got to bring your children to the Lord at an early age. This is where they will receive spiritual nurturing. This is where they will see God's love in action. This is where they will hear God's word used by a community of believers. This is where they will be trained to rightly divide God's Truth. This is where they will practice reaching out to others in love. This is where they will learn by example to submit to the will of God. This is the place designated by God to raise up his people "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (Eph.4:13).

I hear some say, "I don't go to church because when I was a little kid my parents jammed religion down my throat." That's the worst thing you can do for kids is to jam religion down their throats. But I have yet to hear anyone say, "My parents jammed Jesus Christ down my throat, the one who loves me and who gave his life for me and who rules at the right hand of God the Father Almighty and who has prepared a place for me in heaven." Religion comes from the pit of Hell but Christianity comes from the throne of Heaven. We've got to give our children the Lord Jesus Christ and let them taste the living water of his love for us. That's the first loving thing you can do for your children. Bring them safely into the ark away from the outside world where death reigns. Let them learn from the Master of Truth rather than the Prince of Lies. Then they will be prepared to deal with the world and its falsehoods.

Secondly, love rejoices in the truth and children need to learn the truth of God's Word. Let the first words they speak be Jesus and God. By learning God's word, children will learn about themselves, about where they fit in God's plan, about sin and why they behave as they do. This isn't to instill them with shame and self-hatred and hopelessness as some psychologists would have us believe. Rather it's to help them understand what a wonderful thing has been wrought for them by Jesus Christ. When they begin to appreciate through his word the majesty of God Almighty, the wonder of his creation, the love of Christ, and the power of prayer, then they will understand the world around them and how to deal with it realistically.

Thirdly they need to be brought under the chastening and instruction of the Lord which is corrective discipline. That's from Ephesians 6:4. In the books I've been reading for this series I see again and again the caution to balance love with discipline and discipline with love. But every time I see it I disagree with it because they put love over here and discipline over there as if the two were separate things. Discipline means two things. First, punishment for doing evil and second, bringing a child to church for instruction in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Discipline is the most loving thing a parent can do. Love is not in opposition to this nor need it be balanced with discipline. Discipline is love. Look at 1 Corinthians 13. Love rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, even when that protection means using a hammer to smash records.

Love always hopes no matter how many times a child continues in his rebellion. Love always perseveres no matter what the barriers are or the handicaps may be.

Consistent Loving Discipline

How many times have you thrown your hands in the air and said, “I give up!” That’s not love. Love perseveres. It is always successful and it’s the greatest of all the virtues. It always endures. Corrective discipline is an investment in the future. It is not something that should be expected to have immediate benefits. When your child is grown he will look back and take pride in the fact that you stuck with him and did all you could to raise him right, even when that meant taking him across your knee.

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:10-11

God does not discipline us so that we become mad or so that we run away from the church saying, “I had religion stuffed down my throat.” The purpose of it? Holiness. Righteousness. Peace. We live in a day and age when if it feels good we do it. What that means is that if it doesn’t feel good we don’t do it. Discipline doesn’t feel good so we avoid it if we can. That’s the way of the world. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, “If you do just the opposite of the world you stand a good chance of being Biblical.” Discipline is never convenient. Kids will misbehave at the worst times hoping they can be rebellious while avoiding the punishment for it. So they’ll misbehave when company is present or when you are out at a restaurant or they’ll misbehave at some other inconvenient time and place.

For the parents who use nagging, bugging, slugging or hugging this will be a very common event. But for those who love their kids enough to set limits on their behavior by the seat of their pants, it will be an uncommon event. I love to hear a father ask the waitress which way to the bathroom so he can discipline his child even while out in public. The other forms will simply not work. Parents who use them will make everyone around them miserable too as the disobedience continues and the verbal threats mount. That just isn’t God’s way.

Discipline is unpleasant and painful. It’s the same kind of discipline that is required to go to night school or to go to medical school or law school or seminary or to succeed at any other form of “discipline” or “training.” You give your children a foundation for success in life when you care enough to spend the time and effort necessary to discipline them properly. The benefits come afterward and last a lifetime. Help your child to learn self-control in the little things so that he will have self-control in the big things. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit that requires training to blossom fully. Some parents worry that if they discipline with the rod then their children will not love them. Let me tell you something. That’s not the issue. The issue is whether they will learn to love God.

If they love God they will automatically love their parents. Discipline is not different from or separate from your love for them. It creates in them a love for God’s law and an appreciation of its benefits for them. God’s law and his discipline do not place burdensome constraints on them as the world would have them believe. Freedom only exists within the law, not apart from it. Exercising that freedom can only succeed under discipline, not apart from it. Help your children to grasp that truth. It’s your duty as a loving parent.

Chapter 6

“A Very Prominent Family”

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Gal.6:1-10

We've been looking at the family during the past five chapters. We've learned about various aspects of the family, about why things go wrong in the family, and about why things go wrong with the people who make up the family. And in the process I hope we've discovered quite a lot about ourselves and about what God demands of us as Christians. It's unfortunate that many of us have paid little attention to what is written in God's Word. We don't pray as we should and thus we fall into temptation, and temptation leads to sin and sin has so many awful ramifications for us and for our families. Now in this final chapter on the Family I want to stress the fact that the Church of the Living God is also called the Family of God or the Family of Believers. In Paul's letter to the Galatians the very first word we read is a word of kinship, "Brothers." God addresses us with and uses terms that relate to us as a family. In fact, we could say God is a family God. When he deals with mankind he deals with us in a family way. I want to examine how this concept of the church as a family affects us in the way we live and especially in the way we treat the single parents and broken families who live among us. As we look at the needs of these two special groups I also want to describe the responsibility we have to behave in a family-like manner toward each other and toward God.

Family as God's Design

We see the concept of a family belonging to God from the very first in Scripture: from the creation of Adam and Eve. God did not create Adam and Eve as separate individuals but as one flesh, from one flesh, a unit established and organized by God as a family. Ever since that first family unit, God has maintained the family's essential character through all the generations of men. God bestows both his pleasure and his displeasure on families as a whole, though he punishes only the offending member. This is what we learned from Eli's example in the last chapter; the consequence of our sin extends beyond ourselves and affects everyone around us but we are each punished for our own sin. The same can be said of righteousness. When Noah found favor with God, that favor carried over to Noah's family, and that's why we must bring our families with us into the "ark of God's covenant," so that they too can come to enjoy the Presence of God in their lives and the security and peace which result from his Lordship.

When God called Abraham, he called him away from his earthly family and relationships so that Abraham could begin a new relationship, a familial relationship with God. Because of Abraham's relationship with God and his uprightness before the Lord, his nephew Lot was saved. The favor he enjoyed with God carried over to his family. In God's dealings with Jacob too we see that Jacob's whole family was involved. Even in the Biblical listings of families we can see this principle at work. The listings use the name of the head of the family, but the entire family is included under that name and is identified by it even as we are identified with Christ by using his name. So in all this we see just how important God considers the family unit in his plan of Salvation.

This emphasis on the family applies to the New Testament as well as it did to the Old Testament. Paul consistently applies family terms in his letters to convey the sense of kinship and blood ties that bind the church together despite differences of heritage among the members of the church. Nationality, language, culture, dress, status and race are absorbed in the family of God and united under one head, even Jesus Christ our Lord. In Matthew 12:46-50 we read,

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

He replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

It is well and truly time we realize that as Christians, whether we view ourselves internationally or merely as a local congregation, we are really just one large family. And that is particularly true of us here in this fellowship of believers at Village Seven Presbyterian Church. We belong to each other because we belong to Christ. We have been born into this family by the blood of his sacrifice, and thus his blood surges through each of us giving nourishment and life to his body as a whole. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord and we should therefore have a family mentality when it comes to the needs, ministries and activities of the congregation as a whole too. The Family of God is a place we are born into in the same way that we are born into our earthly family. We are blood relatives to Christ and we assumed this relationship when we were "born again." It is a relationship that cannot be denied anymore than you can deny your blood ties with your earthly family.

Church as Family

One of the couples baptized into the Body of Christ at our church said, "This is the place where we met the Lord Jesus Christ." That is true for all of us. The local church body is a meeting place for the family of God. And yet when this couple left for Japan they took their Christianity with them; as family members we said good-bye to them and sent them off with our love, but we knew that they would find other brothers and sisters in the Lord whom they hadn't yet known. We were the family gathered at their birth, for birth is what brings us into the Family of God. But the family of God gathers together each time two or more meet together in Christ's name, and such gatherings of his family take place every minute of the day in every corner of the world.

We share a common birth in Christ. It isn't a physical birth but a spiritual birth: "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (Jn.1:13) "Unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven... Unless a man is born of

water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn.3:3,5) I want to point out to you seven or so important aspects of this Family of Believers that I have been talking about, things which I believe Paul addresses when he writes, “Let us do good to all people, but especially to those who belong to the family of God.”

First of all, the Family of God is a place of restoration. What is restoration? Well, restoration is bound up in forgiveness and new birth which we experience in two distinct ways. On the one hand, we are “restored” to God’s favor by a spiritual rebirth which comes from acknowledging Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. That acknowledgment removes our guilt. Thus in this family we have found the forgiveness of God because we have been restored to his favor by the sacrifice of his son on our behalf. And we have been renewed in our spirits through our conversion and rebirth. God’s Spirit now dwells within us cleansing and sanctifying us and remaking us in the image of Christ. The taint of our sinful nature is being removed and our godly nature is being restored to its original luster as Adam once knew it. But then there is another way that we experience restoration.

Rather than a spiritual restoration which, though tangible in every way, is limited to changes within us, there is also a restoration of external fellowship with the family of God. Larry Crabb, in his book “The Marriage Builder” tells us that Christ is all-sufficient for us spiritually, emotionally and physically. That is, in him we are loved and we are complete. But through our spouse we experience this love so that we feel loved and we feel complete. The same relationship we have in a marriage we have in the church. We know we are loved by Christ and thus we are secure. But it’s even better when we are made to feel loved and to feel secure by our brothers and sisters in the Lord. In our marriage if our spouse fails to make us feel this way, we remain complete in Christ and we remain strong in our faith. Why should it be any different in the church? Yet how much more rewarding, how much more fulfilling, how much more wonderful it would be if we could be made to feel the love, security and completeness that we have in Christ through the family life of the church body!

Love and Reconciliation

Through our contact with the people of God we can come to know in a very real way the love of God that has been revealed to us in our hearts. And so in this family we have found the safest harbor in the world, because the family of believers is indeed a place of restoration. God has established his church as the means of restoration of our spiritual, emotional and physical needs. God, you see, is in the restoration business, and it is a family owned and operated concern. “He restores my soul,” the psalmist says, and God consistently and continually does just that through the outreach of his people and the word he has entrusted to them. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” (Gal.6:1) Let me give you an example.

Pastor Ray Stedman visited our congregation in the summer of 1984 and shared with me an incident in his church. A young man came into their midst whom everyone thought was a born-again believer and certainly had all the outward signs of being a Christian. He was of Jewish extraction with a brilliant mind and apparent dedication to the work of the Lord. Nonetheless, after working very diligently in the church for two years someone brought to Dr. Stedman’s attention that the young man’s behavior didn’t quite add up to what he had been saying with his lips. After an investigation it turned out that this young man was a practicing homosexual. The matter came before the board of elders where the young man became quite belligerent and unrepentant, and so he was removed from fellowship. They do not use the term

excommunication in that particular church, but they regard unrepentant wayward people as Non-Christians. The young man became very angry and left the church.

But a few people in the congregation committed themselves to pray for this young man every day. Nearly four years later he returned to the church. He confessed his sins to God and the church and said that he had divorced himself completely from this wrongful lifestyle. He then asked for forgiveness and permission to be restored to the church. They gave him all that he asked for. After some time had passed to observe the young man's new fruits, Dr. Stedman picked about fifty people to join him for a bar-b-que, including this young man. What they did was buy a small calf for the bar-b-que which was prepared and roasted over a spit before the young man arrived. Having shown the fruit of repentance in his life, they welcomed him back into the fellowship of the church in an unusual manner: they took off the young man's shoes and put new shoes on his feet; they took off his coat and put a new coat on his back; and then Dr. Stedman put a ring on his finger, kissed him and welcomed him back into the family, just like the story of the prodigal son returned.

That young man is developing into someone extraordinary in the family of God. He has already addressed the Jewish Senate in Jerusalem on the fact that Christianity is basically Jewish, and he has taken advantage of other opportunities to speak out for his faith, opportunities which are unique to him because he is unique in the Lord. Had the church not "restored" him to fellowship, his work for the Lord might have ended at that point. The worst thing that you can ever do for a homosexual is to condone his lifestyle, because it will destroy him. There is no other place he can go outside of the church to find forgiveness, healing and restoration from God.

Submission and Accountability

Secondly, the Family of God is a place of watchfulness. We are commanded to restore our stumbling brothers and sisters, but we are also cautioned to "watch" ourselves lest we be tempted and dragged down with them. The Bible continually warns us to be careful, to watch out, to heed, to listen; we may be walking on a path with hidden pitfalls. Satan always approaches the Christian from the blind side so we need to be watchful and obedient to the word of God to avoid his wiles and temptations. We need to live by the word of God rather than just mouth it with empty words. If I were to ask you what is meant by a "faith organization" or by someone "living by faith" what would you say? The average Christian in America would say, "Ah! A faith organization is an organization that is looking to the Lord to supply their financial needs at the end of each month." Or, "people living by faith are people who have no definite support, no contract with the church or with an organization pledging so much money for support." In other words, living by faith means hoping they will receive enough money to pay the bills for the month. We seem to have stereotyped people who live by faith as people who worry all the time about whether they will get a check or not. But living by faith means so much more.

I want to challenge you to accept the fact that living by wishing and worrying about money is not truly living by faith. Living by faith is not hoping a check is in the mail. It is living day by day in obedience to the word of God. If we are obedient then we can accept the check with thankfulness to God, or we can accept the absence of the check with the very same thankfulness. The word of God should have a visible effect on our day to day habits, thought, speech, and behavior. It measures and defines what is good and valuable in our lives. Unfortunately what we read in God's word is usually the very opposite of what you and I want to do. And so we are really putting our lives on the line when we say, "No, I will not make that choice; I will not go that

route; I will not commit that sin because I want to live by faith and faith is never divorced from obedience to God.” We must be careful to do just that, to live out our lives in obedience to God. It acknowledges the power of God and unleashes it in our lives to glorify his name. It not only proves our faith, it also gains us great assurance in our faith (Jm.2:14-26, 1Tim.3:13). Watchfulness characterizes the Family of God. That is, it is a character trait that identifies us as God’s children. We do not “wing it” or “let it all hang out.” Rather we are careful to do our Father’s will and to be circumspect in our behavior. That’s what we mean by watchfulness and faithful living.

Sharing Burdens

Thirdly, the Family is a place of shared burdens. Paul writes, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal.6:2; see also Rom.13:8,10; Mt.7:12;22:37) It is a place where we have an opportunity, not a compulsion or a duty, but an opportunity to share each other’s burdens. Most of the things I spoke about in the other five chapters applied mainly to the typical family unit of father, mother and children. But there is quite a percentage of families even in our own congregation where that is simply not the case. We are faced today with more and more single-parent families who have a unique set of burdens to face and need our help. We have made provisions in the church to lend support through our prayer chain, through the Deacon’s fund (which is available to people both within and without our congregation to provide funds, food, clothing, etc.), and through the Deaconesses and various women’s ministries which provide visitation teams, hot meal deliveries, child-care co-ops and many other wonderful programs. These are all opportunities to share burdens, to reveal our needs and then to see the love of Christ in action: having those needs met by our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

We must let the single parents in our midst know that they are complete and fulfilled in Christ. They must be able to see tangible evidence that despite the loss of a companion through death or divorce or for whatever reason, their family is still whole within the Family of God. We are true blood relations who will take them in, love them, nourish them and provide for them no less than an earthly family would take them in and provide for their needs. I want them to know that if they have been born again through the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, if they have been made alive through the Spirit of God, then they belong to the Family of God. They are a very important and necessary part of this family of believers. They are not second-class citizens; as members of our church they belong to us and we to them; they belong to God and are tied to us in heritage and rewards. We all carry the same name tags and we all live together under the same roof in God’s house. As such we share and share alike, both the good times and the bad, times of feasting and times of fasting, the days of ease and the nights of sorrow.

Eight Cautions for Single Parents

But there are eight cautions that single parents must heed:

1) *Don’t get caught in a guilt trap.* The continuation of guilt in your heart and mind will deteriorate your usefulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and your effectiveness as a single parent.

2) *Don’t feel sorry for yourself.* You have nothing to feel sorry about. Jesus has forgiven you, he has restored you, and now you are a full member of the Family of God, the family of believers.

3) *Don't feel bitter, but thankful.* Bitterness will ruin your health, distort your decisions, and undermine your family life. Be thankful for your children who are a gift from God, and be thankful for what God has done on your behalf in calling you into his family. You are not your own but you were bought with a price: the precious blood of Christ.

4) *Forget the past.* Paul says, "One thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal..." (Php.3:14) The problem is so many people forget what they should remember and remember what they should forget. We need to forget our sins but we need to remember the grace that is available to us. We need to forget the pain of our trials but we need to remember the hard-won lessons that resulted from them. Press on toward the goal with eyes firmly fixed on Christ, not on the past.

5) *Don't expect others to fully understand how you feel.* This is particularly true of happily married couples with obedient children. They have great difficulty identifying with you. People often say to me, "But Pastor Kuiper, you don't know how I feel," and I have to agree with them. I don't. But God does. And there are others in the congregation who do, who have been through trials no less difficult than your own. They have been placed here by God to identify with you and encourage you in your own trials. Seek them out and be forgiving of those others who cannot understand.

6) *You need to order your life according to Biblical rules.* This isn't something which comes easily to anyone and it's certainly not like following a recipe. It requires study and time in God's word. It involves committing yourself to reshaping your life in accordance with the will of God and by the power of his holy Spirit. It demands service that will glorify God. Though difficult at first, the discipline you put into your Christian life will result in great joy, peace, purpose and fulfillment.

7) *You need to call for help.* No single woman who has the responsibility to care not only for herself but also for her young children, should ever make difficult decisions by herself. Call on the elders of the church, the deacons, the men of the church who would be so eager to help you. We have an elder who leads a yearly financial seminar, who provides advice on important financial decisions. Don't make these kinds of decisions on your own. There are women who will help you; make use of their years of experience and wisdom. If the husband were present he would discuss such decisions with his wife, and with the men that he works with before acting on them. The single mother is no less dependent on the advice and guidance of others. A woman came to me after I preached on the fact that a woman in marriage should be submissive to her husband. She said, "You've been talking about marriage, but I've never been married, and it looks like I never will be married. You've taught us that a woman should never be autonomous and stand on her own. I wasn't very happy about that when you said it because I've been on my own for years and years and yet you told us that was unbiblical. Now what am I to do?" I said, "You are a member in this congregation and you need to put yourself under the authority and oversight of the elders of the church, so that you will feel secure and safe." She said, "I never thought of that. I've had to make some decisions over the years that were very difficult. Now I know that I could have gone to the elders! I could have gotten help from the church." Remember, you belong to the Family of God and help is indeed available to you.

8) *Don't marry in a hurry.* You would be amazed how many single women marry again on the rebound or out of grief and loneliness, just to have someone around. The second state is worse than the first. Be wise. Seek counsel. If you meet someone else that you like, bring him to the

elders of the church. Introduce him to me; I'll run him through his paces... People laughed when I wouldn't permit my daughters to date before age sixteen. Both my girls married their only dates, and yet they are happily married to Christian young men. But you should have seen those big guys when they had to come into my study to ask permission to take out my daughters (and my one daughter was already 21). My girls had to tell their boyfriends, "before you can take me out, you've got to meet with my father." And that's why they only had one date. Now, however, when my daughters look back and see how safe they were, and see that their young men appreciated how highly I regarded my daughters, they understand why I insisted on meeting their dates and postponing their courtship period. It is not a time for flights of fancy and fairy-tale romance. It is a time for seriously considering the choice of a lifemate, a life-long companion and provider, a lover and supporter, a child nurturer and spiritual partner. Don't rush into such a crucial relationship out of desperation.

How does the church look at single parents and their children? We have a great responsibility as the Family of God. First of all, we must not be judgmental. This is a safe place for them to be. Here is where they ought to be. And if you are a single parent, then this is the place where you ought to bring your children, and where you ought to feel safe, and where you will not be criticized. This is a place where you will not be brought under judgment. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are our brother or sister in Christ and you belong here. Secondly, as a church we need to be aware of the peculiar and particular needs of the single parents among us. They have needs that those of us who are happily married don't even think about. Dick Wulf, a Christian counselor and psychologist who belongs to our church, pointed out that if a single woman who has two little children goes out for the evening and hires a baby-sitter, when she returns there is no one to drive home the sitter. So she must always hire a baby-sitter who can drive herself home. That immediately limits the availability of sitters for her. That never even entered my mind. We need to be aware of these kinds of needs.

Then, as a church I think we need to reach out to the single parent community much more. I know some churches where the singles are looked at as some kind of a nuisance. By nature and circumstance they've usually got more going out than coming in each month and simply can't be expected to be among the church's top contributors. They are part of that group that needs our protection and support. In God's plan, they are the very ones that have been placed under the wings of the church, and so we are commanded by Scripture to provide for them. They are an identifiable portion of our body that affords us all a great opportunity to show Christlikeness and Christian love. We need to reach out to them and especially to their children. For single fathers there is a need for female role models for their daughters. For single mothers there is a need for the strong discipline of a man's loving care for her sons.

The Church as Husband

A lady in our church in Atlanta had three or four really big boys in her family. Her father had run out on her earlier in her life, and then she later became a Christian. Soon after becoming a Christian, however, her husband ran off with a neighbor. Now she was left with these oversized (and unconverted) teenage boys. They were belligerent and insubordinate; they would not obey her; and worst of all she was afraid of them, of her own children. She shared that with us and I got a bunch of big deacons from the church and we faced those boys eyeball to eyeball. We told them, "Your mother is our sister and either you obey her or you'd better watch out, because we're gonna come after you."

The next Sunday all four of them were sitting right in the front pew. That woman cried when we told her she was our sister and we would protect her. Even though she had no husband to turn to, she could turn to us. I think that we ought to adopt these families. We ought to invite them for meals and invite them to join us in our homes and let our children have a chance to play with theirs. Invite them to a picnic to share more than just food for the body. Share food for the soul. The church isn't a place where we are limited to exchanging greetings on a Sunday morning. The church is a place where we share each other's burdens.

Constructive Confrontation

Fourthly, the Family is a place of honesty and self-examination. Let's look at verse three again from Galatians six. "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." I smiled at this when I was preparing this series. I wondered, "How does anyone discover that he is nothing?" And I concluded that you have to come to church to find that out. You'll hear it all the time there. And it's also in the home where you'll hear these very honest and open "discussions," where parents will confront their teenagers in a very direct way and say to them, "I'm gonna tell you something that no one else in the world is going to tell you and I'm only going to say it because I love you." The church, like the home, is a place of confrontation, confrontation with the truth about ourselves, confrontation with others about the truth of God. It's a place where you won't hear that "everyone is beautiful in his own way." That's a lie. It's what Satan likes to tell everyone: "You're beautiful and wonderful and free to do as you please, and you'll be loved by everyone, even God, as long as you've got a 'nice personality' and you're willing to compromise a bit."

But God says, "Unless you too repent you will all perish." (Lk.13:3,5) In his sight you are ugly. Your righteousness, or rather your self-righteousness, the things of which you are proud are like filthy rags in the sight of God. Our actions and our worth are to be tested by the Word. "Each one should test his own actions." (Gal.6:4) And how do we test our own actions? By the standard laid down in the Word of God. We are forbidden from performing a side by side comparison "taste" test with others (Madison Ave would be furious to hear that). "Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load." (verses 4 and 5) And when we run the test against God's standard we don't "adjust" the text like they do in some liberal churches to match their lifestyle.

There was a captain of a ship some years ago who saw a light approaching and so he signaled the other ship, "Adjust your course ten degrees south." A signal came back, "No. You adjust your own course." So he repeated his message and again he received the same reply. By the third time around he was furious and so he signaled, "Now I'm telling you: I am the captain of a flagship. I am fully armed. Adjust your course ten degrees south or else." This time the reply was just as firm, but a little more detailed. "I am the lighthouse keeper and I am not about to adjust my course!" The Bible is a Lighthouse to us. It's not going to adjust. It is the rock of our Salvation and it will not be moved. "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words will never pass away." (Mat.24:35)

We are the ones who must adjust. Scripture contains absolute truth and it provides us with an absolutely accurate reflection of ourselves that cannot be hidden or altered. It forces us to confront life itself with honesty and self-examination; and the best place to confront the Truth in this way is in the church. It is from within the safety and security and the loving comfort of the family of God that we are best able to deal honestly with ourselves and with each other. The

church is indeed a place of honesty and self-examination, a lighthouse in a sea of falsity and self-righteousness.

Serving to Create Ties that Bind

Fifthly, the Family of God is a place of individual responsibility. Carrying each other's burdens does not mean abdicating our own responsibility when the burden belongs to us. Paul writes in verse five of Galatians six, "for each one should carry his own load." All of us in the church should be doing at least one additional thing other than worshipping on Sunday. You will never get away with it, when you stand before the throne of Christ, and have to admit that all you ever did was sit in a pew on Sunday. I went to Baylor some months ago to watch my son Paul play basketball. And as I sat there watching him run from one end of the court to the other exhausting himself and running short of breath, I thought of that often-used image of the church: here we have ten people desperately in need of rest while in the stands sit ten thousand desperately in need of exercise.

We have a small group of people in the church who need to take some time for themselves while so many sit idly by consuming them in their labors. Those who are not active in the body life of the church are not active in the spiritual life of Christ. The church is a school, a training ground for acting out the faith that we have confessed with our lips. How can so many be content to fail a course and be left behind a grade because they haven't completed the work? Everyone has a responsibility. Everyone needs to live up to a standard laid down by Christ, each in his or her own way, each in his or her own area of concern, each graded according to the privileges bestowed on him by God. But each and every one of us has a responsibility in the Family of God!

Tithing to Help Those in Need

Sixthly, the Family of God is a place of financial responsibility. "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor." (Gal.6:6) This is a verse which says that we've got to support the church financially. We've been exploring the concept that the church is no less a family in the Kingdom of God than our flesh and blood families are in the kingdom of the air. Instructions and cautions contained in Scripture that are addressed to parents and children of earthly families are no less appropriate for parents and children in the Lord. Paul writes Timothy just such a caution to pass on to the church. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1Tim.5:8) We needn't ask, "Who is my relative?" for Christ would give us the same answer he gave to the question "Who is my neighbor?" While we provide for the needs of our own immediate family in the world, the church does far more than provide for just its own. There are outreach programs and ministries that stretch around the world.

We willingly spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on toys and entertainment to divert us, whether it's at Christmas, or for a birthday, or just for the sake of a moment's escape. Then we give grudgingly to the Lord from what remains in our accounts after the charge cards are cleared, after we have gratified our natural desires for personal pleasure. If you haven't got the victory on tithing, then you haven't really come to know the peace and joy that accompany relying on the Lord. You need to really examine your heart and begin giving God what he asks for. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and then all these other blessings will be given to you as well." (Mt.6:33) The tithe is an acknowledgment that you are not your own, nor do you possess

anything that does not already belong to God. It is a demonstration to God that you understand your role as his steward. It is a way of contributing to the work of the saints in a manner pleasing to God.

Did you know at this point in time it costs \$12,000 per week to run this church? That's not counting the building plans for a new sanctuary and Family Life Center. Its just the ordinary operating expenses and missions budgets. We're not going to succeed in our ministries with a little bit of pocket money tossed in the collection pouch each week. It requires a commitment to the cause of Christ that drives us to put our money where our mouth is, to act out our faith in a practical dollars and cents fashion. It costs money to provide for missionaries and food programs. It costs money to heat, light, insure and maintain a building to house two thousand people on a Sunday morning. You will have to be very serious about this; you will have to sacrifice; you will have to tithe; you will have to do without your desires so that the Kingdom of God will have what it needs. David once said, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." (2Sam.24:24) There are people who focus on feeding themselves without concern for the needs of others or the desires of God (and of course they are outside the realm of Christ) while there are others who live for the glory of God. Galatians 6:7-10 provides a commentary on those who give and those who do not give.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Gal.6:7-9)

I used to read this passage apart from verse six, but in fact it is referring directly to it. There is a direct link between giving to the Family of God and reaping a spiritual harvest. The Family of God was present at your birth into the kingdom; it has nourished and instructed you in the Word of God and the Way of Christ. And yet for many people who must give up something when they get in a financial pinch, the first thing they give up is their contribution to the Lord's work. You cannot reap a harvest if you eat your seed. The tithe and our offerings are really seed money, investments in lives and in the Kingdom of God. We harvest what we have not sown only in the sense that God is the Redeemer of men, not us. But we do invest in harvest machinery to reap the Master's fields when we give to the church. You see, the church is here to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph.4:12). The money we invest in it provides us in turn with the tools we need to work in the fields sown by God Almighty. He has made us participants in the divine nature and given us a ministry of reconciliation (2Pet.1:4; 2Cor.5:18). We are the instrument of his gracious outreach in this world. This responsibility carries with it the understanding that we will underwrite the financial obligations of the cause of Christ as well as assume moral accountability for our behavior in that cause. The Family of God is a place of financial responsibility.

Sacrifice and Hard Work

Lastly, the church is also a place of constant reminder and warning. Let me share with you a short passage from Dick Wulf's book, "Find Yourself, Give Yourself." I hope you have bought a copy of it. Boy! What an honest little book this is. It contains exactly the kind of reminder and warning that should characterize an active body life in any church:

It is impossible to live a life that you can respect from a godly perspective while you are addicted to (1) the acquisition of money and (2) the pursuit of pleasure... Christians are seldom much different from the

heathens living in their neighborhoods. Not only do they want the good life, just as their neighbors do, but they define that good life remarkably the same... The problem is pervasive: too many Christians want their church experience above all to be pleasurable. Worship is often defined by the concept of pleasure, rather than pleasure by the concept of worship.

I'm not saying that Christians should not have fun, but that we should define enjoyment in the context of what is important to God. Fun should be a spiritual rest, not a churchy occupation or preoccupation. As Christians we should look forward to being together and bearing one another's burdens more than we should look forward to fishing, hunting, skiing, or watching television. We should put far more energy into establishing godly characteristics than we should put into the athletic prowess of our youth or the business success of our adults.

A Christian with godly self-respect will be content to work at the place of employment given by God. Changes in employment will be made in the context of furthering the cause of God in some way. Considerations of money and pleasure will consequently be less important in decisions concerning job changes. The importance of employment should be to support one's basic needs and to serve God in a particularly assigned place of work.

Even activities of faith are often done in a humanistic fashion or for hedonistic purposes. For example, perhaps we determine to be involved in Bible study solely to help us change into a better person. That's too limited. We should study the bible moreover to determine God's will, to see his vision for us, and to be able to worship in depth because we know him better. Let us avoid the kind of Bible study that keeps us out of action, Bible study which is sought for pleasurable experience which is actually recreation rather than re-creation.

Americans as a whole... have gotten so used to comfort that they are usually not interested in anything which is unpleasurable. Let those who don't personally know God continue with such hedonistic lifestyles. But such a distorted form of Christianity should be driven out of the church.

Dick Wulf¹

Folks, that's certainly a firm reminder and warning about our role as servants of God. The Family of God is a place of nurturing and support, but it's a two-way street. Family life that is rich and rewarding requires hard work and commitment. The Family of God will place demands on you, just like your earthly family, but because you were brought into God's Family by the atoning sacrifice of his son, it's also the place you belong. May we get a new attitude toward what it means to be a member of this congregation. May we grasp what it means to be a member of the most prominent Family in all of creation. May we grow in respect, in obedience, and in knowledge of the head of this Family, the Lord of Creation, the Lord God Almighty. May we act out our faith in a loving and supportive way among our family members, and among our brothers and sisters in Christ. And may the sincerity of our actions in the world bring glory and honor to the name of God. Amen.

¹ Wulf, Dick, *Find Yourself, Give Yourself* (Navpress, Colorado Springs, 1983), pp.28-29.