



## **Child-safe**

### ***Godly principles for raising children***

It is interesting that whereas Luther emphasised the Law of God as that which exposes our sin and drives us to Christ (e.g. Gal 3:23, 24), Calvin, whilst not denying this truth, emphasised its role as shaping our gratitude for the gift of salvation in Christ. Godly living will involve taking to heart and putting into practice on a daily basis what has been set out for us in the ten commandments, Jesus' summary and the specific applications given in the Gospels and Epistles.

There is no question that the way the two sexes relate has changed in recent times as to what is considered appropriate behaviour and language, and generally so for the worse.

Christians are not immune to these changes, so here are some practical measures that promote godly behaviour and happiness for men and women and their children who in due time will also marry.

Ideally all of us, male and female, should expect to marry and raise a family. This is a reasonable expectation even though not always met for unavoidable reasons. Celibacy is not the norm even though circumstances or God's call may require it.

It is desirable, wherever possible, that people marry earlier rather than later, not least to avoid fornication and to encourage having children while still young.

Care is required to ensure a couple are well suited and ready for marriage and that the marriage is supported by parents. Marriage preparation classes are the key to ensuring the couple is well-suited, ready and understands the nature and inviolability (the "not to be broken" nature) of marriage.

Pastors and parents have a particular and important role to play as children grow into the teenage years and certainly well before they start courting. They must particularly guard against the widely held understanding in Australian society that marriage is essentially an emotional union — which is why so many break up.

Positively, what parents and pastors need to teach is that marriage is the comprehensive union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other, of the type that is fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. It is the nature of this commitment — permanent and exclusive that combine to create a special link to children, for their sake, that protects their identity and nurture by a mother and father. The link to children is what gives marriage its special character.

Just as important as the marriage vows — "to have and to hold from this day forth, for..." are the purposes given for marriage:

First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of His holy Name.

Second, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. (1662 Anglican Prayer Book) Interestingly, in John Calvin's Geneva, the decisive action in marriage was not the wedding itself but the engagement which determined the dowry and secured the consent of both the couple and the two sets of parents to the marriage. Once the engagement occurred, the wedding was required to take place within six weeks.

Today, engagement periods are far too long and are only a temptation to fornication and the stress engendered by trying to avoid fornication. Once the decision to marry is taken, the couple should marry promptly in a simple, inexpensive wedding.

With the blessing of children (and I would suggest young couples should give consideration to natural methods of controlling fertility), parents need to think about training their children in obedience, developing good manners, learning the difference between right and wrong, differentiating those things which lead to good outcomes from those leading to bad outcomes, becoming a good citizen and so on. The Bible has a good deal to say about disciplining the child. It must be done but how it is done, can be varied according to circumstances, family patterns and the response of the child.

Family worship should always be a given, led by the father or, in his absence, the mother. In this way children are taught to pray and learn private devotions by the example of parents.

The point of the marriage vows that they are maintained "until death do us part" simply says marriage is for life. Marriage can be testing, but we grow together through testing. Marriage partners make a commitment to one another publicly that they are to honour.

Enough is now known from the Family Law Court to say that divorce is invariably bad for the children and usually bad for one, if not both marriage partners.

The bottom line for a young person contemplating marriage is: take care in your choice of a partner, listen to your parents, marry a fellow Christian, remember and honour the marriage vows and work hard to please one another, to please the Lord and to benefit and bless the children thereby giving them the best possible start to life. Marriage is not to be lightly entered into: it is for life. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)

There are of course many practical issues that couples and parents need to discuss and agree on. Our pastors, whether in preaching or in small groups or in pastoral visitation, need to address these issues.

Some of the questions I have in mind are:

How to guard against sexual sin in practical terms? Christian men need to help one another, husband and wives need to understand one another's sexual needs and impulses.

What is appropriate modesty in dress and behaviour?

How to guard the tongue? The tongue can cause immense damage that is hard to undo (Jas 3:1). Filthy language is completely inappropriate for the Christian and must not be tolerated (Col 3:8). Ministers and fathers have a particular example to set in this respect. Sexual innuendo is totally inappropriate as are "making eyes" and generally flirting type behaviour.

Where to live, how much debt to take on board which relates to housing, furniture, car(s), possessions generally?

There needs to be a deliberate effort to avoid or at least minimise debt by restricting the scope of ambition. Mark 8:34 and 1 Peter 2:11-12 are crucial lifestyle texts.

How long will the wife work before starting a family? Issues of fertility and ability to cope with children favour early child-bearing.

What will be the rules about children's mobile phones and computers? Parents need to carry out basic surveillance in the home, and certainly not allow them in the bedroom at night.

Just how does the family prevent pornography creeping in to the home with its destructive effects?

In all of these issues and many more, we need to remember human frailty, more specifically that of ourselves and our children. If at all possible, we will always fall into sinful patterns of thinking, speaking and acting — so deeply entrenched is Adam's sin in our lives. We need to consciously inwardly digest and act out Psalm 1 in our lives and of course we need liberal doses of the gospel! The ultimate goal is to live godly that our children might live in a godly way!

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