

THE FAMILY

Individualism has done great damage to our nation. Communities depend upon families and the family is based on relationships. When every man does what is right in his own eyes, the nation is imperilled. When order is discarded in family life, the family becomes dysfunctional. The apostle who has most to say about family life is Paul who was neither a husband nor a father. This reminds us of something very important about the Christian view of the family. Our fundamentals derive neither from experience nor empirical research but from revelation.

I. Husbands and wives

Marriage is the inception of a new family. The Lord quoted those words of revelation from Genesis 2, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh' (Matthew 19.5). By divine institution, marriage creates a new family. The man and the woman no longer live separately but must learn to live together. What is to guide them in this awesome relationship? Some words of Paul from Ephesians 5.33 come to mind, 'Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband'. Obviously, we cannot be politically correct and faithful to God's Word. We must choose. Joshua's words as husband and father come to mind, 'And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24.15).

A. The wife's matrimonial duty is to 'reverence her husband'

The Greek verb translated 'reverence' means 'to frighten' and, passively, 'to be alarmed'. By analogy it is used for 'being in awe of'. 'Reverence' suits the meaning here. Can we take Paul seriously on this in the twenty first century? Peter, a married man, says exactly the same in 1 Peter 3.1-6. In verse 1, he writes, 'Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the

word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives'. In verses 5-6 he refers to the example of the Old Testament saints, especially Sarah, 'For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement'. If the inspired Peter could go back 2000 years for an example, it can surely be granted that we can go back 2000 years for instruction in matrimonial duty without the cry, 'That was just cultural!' There is a spiritual essence in this that is timeless: 'let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price'. You see it is a spiritual duty and well pleasing to God. The Greek word translated 'of great price' means 'extremely expensive', something 'very precious' and Peter is thinking of how *God* see things. May our politically correct feminists yet see that there is more to these exhortations than male chauvinism attempting to suppress woman. At God's judgement throne Paul and Peter will be vindicated as champions of true femininity.

B. The husband's matrimonial duty is to love his wife

Paul's words are, 'let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself'. 'Even as himself' is quite a challenge to human selfishness. Things are not going to work out well if the man goes into marriage just thinking about his own gain. This mentality is quite wrong. The man must go into marriage intent upon providing for his wife in all things as he would for himself. This has physical, emotional and spiritual implications. In times of illness he will do his best to help. In times of upset he will seek to be a comfort. In spiritual battles he must be ready to lead. In all of the details of life he cannot be content with *functioning*. He must be *loving*. When it comes to tender care most husbands learn much when their wives become mothers. In maternal care they see in action the compassionate devotion that should characterize their love for their wife centering not on self but on her benefit. Many divorces could have been avoided had such care been in evidence.

C. Christian husbands and wives have an unfailing example that they can understand

Paul presents Christ and his Church as our pattern in the following words: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Ephesians 5.22-25). Wives are to have in mind their duty to the Lord. In submitting to their husbands they are to act as those who serve the Lord. The dignity in this is beyond calculation. The husband's headship with respect to the home is no less real than Christ's headship over the church. The balance in this is truly astonishing. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ also loved the church. Think of the Saviour's compassionate care for children, the blind, deaf, lepers, ignorant sinners and, at the last, Mary his mother. What a standard this is! But wait, Paul has not finished. He adds, 'and gave himself for it'. Such was his love for his church that he sacrificed himself for it. We see nobility in a husband standing back to let his wife take the last seat in the lifeboat or standing forward to take the assassin's bullet but such is not the measure of the Saviour's love. As the substitute for sinners, he plunged into the depths of Hell to save. The eternal wrath of God came upon him instead of upon sinners. Who can take in such love as this love of the Lamb of God? Husbands cannot thus die for their wives as the substitute in the place of transgressors. Nor does Paul commend such a thing. He says love as Christ loved and gives us the example of the *measure* of Christ's love. It is not substitutionary atonement that is the husband's business but the love that led to it. Self sacrificial love is the standard to balance voluntary, devoted submission. To the politically correct feminist Paul would say, *This* will work.

II. Fathers and mothers

It is the general but not invariable rule that marriage will lead on to procreation. Our English word 'matrimony' is from *mater*, the Latin word for 'mother'. It is not by human ingenuity that children are

conceived, carried in the womb, and born. Nor is it some undirected chance happening by an accidental concourse of atoms. Procreation is the hand of God. Imparting life requires omnipotence. The abortion clinic terminates embryonic life but it cannot bestow it. 'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward' (Psalm 127.3). Children are a sacred trust in the fullest sense of the words and their upbringing demands the most diligent attention. Addressing parents in the person of the household head, Paul writes, 'ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' (Ephesians 6.4). Here is a two-sided duty. The 'but' reminds us that the one course of action is contrary to the other.

A. 'Provoke not your children to wrath'

Here is a call to compassionate wisdom. We are not to spoil our children by over indulging them but in discipline we must not discourage them. I have read that over-indulgence is the fault of mothers and fathers are more prone to severity in relation to their children. It was not my experience for I was "spoilt" by both of my parents. Household discipline is necessary because the root of sin is in us all. The myth of innate goodness is exploded not so much by the existence of murderers of children but the fact of children who are murderers. Our local prison used to be a detention centre for young offenders and if my memory serves me correctly that went down to the age of ten or eleven. Visiting on one occasion for the Gideons was unforgettable as these criminal youngsters and teenagers filed out taking their AV New Testaments. I think few refused and one tore the testament up. For many of these juveniles the Word of God would be the only lifeline back from a lifetime of crime and for all of them the Word of God is the only hope of forgiveness for serious crimes committed in childhood. These youngsters will now be around sixty years old if still alive and exactly what manner of life they will have lived I do not know. What is obvious is that wise parental discipline is fundamental for life and serious mistakes, in any direction are likely to be disastrous. Predatory adults and peer pressure lure many into the deeper recesses of sin. Only by the common goodness of God is our national situation not worse.

B. 'Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'

However wise and loving the discipline, Paul knew from his own life that the only answer to our bondage to sin is spiritual renovation. Christians do not despise academic learning and it is an evil slur in the creation-evolution debate to suggest that they do. Several pioneer creationists have been distinguished scientists in their own fields and many today are very well qualified in chemistry, physics or some other discipline. Evolution is, after all, only an hypothesis and it is important that its claims should be openly tested against all the evidence available not just facts which seem to fit. Origins will always remain a mystery to science because scientists know that *nothing* cannot become *something*, non-life cannot generate life, physical development cannot account for the soul, and materialism provides no basis for morality. The existence of so much religion points to the general conviction of our need for God. In his Epistle to the Romans Paul rejects both Paganism and Judaism. The former for its false view of God and the latter for its confidence in human merit in approaching God. He would have covenant children brought up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'. The entire curriculum should be such as the Lord can approve of because true. When Lord Pearson pointed out in the House of Lords (Dec 2015) that Islam's Koran has many references to killing non-Muslims and that Mohammed used such methods, his point was rejected as misinterpretation. Literature and historical facts are massaged to fit political programmes but Paul says, Let us have truth. In particular, that Christ the eternal Word is the Creator, 'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men' (John 1.3-4). Also that Christ is the only Redeemer, 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2.5-6). These are cornerstones of Christian education.

III. Children and parents

Paul's instruction to those under nurture is precise, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right' (Ephesians 6.1).

A. Note the reference to the fifth commandment

Paul's exhortation to obedience is based directly upon the fifth commandment, which he refers to as follows: 'Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth' (Ephesians 6.2-3). We see from this that the apostles did expound the moral law and expected it to be kept within the church. They could not possibly have been inculcating legalism because they strongly opposed any merit seeking or merely outward conformity. Paul himself is emphatic, 'Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Romans 3.20). Justification is by faith. 'The nurture and admonition *of the Lord* ' must include sound teaching concerning the necessity of pardon, the way of justification and the Spirit's work in sanctification in order to doing what God's law requires. It is true obedience that Paul speaks of such as that of the boy Samuel, the Israelite maid in Naaman's household and the youngster Jesus.

B. Note the emphasis upon promise

God's way is the way of sovereign grace, promise, faith and blessing. Even in childhood it is good to be reminded of the promises of God. The wise man counsels, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth' (Ecclesiastes 12.1). Even children are to have in mind that if we do things God's way we will be blessed. In ancient time God ordinarily showed his blessing in temporal things to such an extent that Job's friends concluded that bereavement, crises and poor health in one professing faith must indicate hypocrisy. We are to understand, however, from the life and death of the Lord Jesus that there are blessings deeper than the outward and observable, that is, the soul's communion with God. David explains, 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light' (Psalm 36.8-9).

Conclusion

Why are family relationships so important? Firstly, the believer is a child and has a heavenly father. Secondly, the church is a wife and has a heavenly bridegroom. 'Christ... loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5.25b-27).

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