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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Twenty-One The Christian Family

God, of course, is the one who came up with the idea of families. It stands to reason then that He could offer us insight into how the families should function and can warn us of those pitfalls that destroy families. Indeed, the Lord has given us many principles in His Word regarding the structure of the family and the role that each individual member should perform. When these biblical instructions are followed, families will experience all the blessings God intended for them to enjoy. When they are violated, havoc and heartache are the result.

The Role of Husband and Wife

God has designed that the Christian family conform to a certain structure. Because this framework provides the stability for family life, Satan works hard to pervert God's intended design.

First, God has ordained that the husband be the head of the family unit. This does not give the husband the right to selfishly dominate his wife and children. God has called husbands to love, protect, provide for, and lead their families as the head. God also intended that wives be submissive to the leadership of their husbands. This is clear from Scripture:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22-24).

The husband is not the *spiritual* head of his wife—Jesus is the one who fulfills that role. Jesus is the spiritual head of the church, and the Christian wife is just as much a member of the church as her Christian husband is. In the family, however, the Christian husband is the head of his wife and children, and they should be submitted to his God-given authority.

To what degree should the wife submit to her husband? She should submit to him in *everything*, just as Paul said. The only exception to that rule would be if her husband expects her to disobey the Word of God or to do something that violates her conscience. Of course, no Christian husband would ever expect his wife to do anything to violate God's

word or her conscience. The husband is not his wife's lord—only Jesus has that place in her life. If she must choose whom to obey, she should choose Jesus.

Husbands should remember that God is not necessarily always “on the husband's side.” God once told Abraham to do what his wife Sarah told him (see Gen. 21:10-12). Scripture also records that Abigail disobeyed her foolish husband Nabal and averted a catastrophe (see 1 Sam. 25:2-38).

God's Word to Husbands

To husbands, God says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her....So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body....Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband (Eph. 5:25, 28-30, 33).

Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church. That is no small responsibility! Any wife will gladly submit to someone who loves her as much as Jesus does—who gave His own life in sacrificial love. Just as Christ loves his own body, the church, so also a husband ought to love the woman with whom he is “one flesh” (Eph. 5:31). If a Christian husband loves his wife as he should, he will provide for her, care for her, honor her, help her, encourage her, and spend time with her. If he fails in his responsibility to love his wife, the husband is in danger of hindering the answer to his own prayers:

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel [body], since she is a woman; and *grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered* (1 Pet. 3:7, emphasis added).

There has never been, of course, a marriage that is completely void of conflicts and disagreements. Through commitment and the development of the fruit of the spirit in our lives, however, husbands and wives can learn to live harmoniously and experience the ever-increasing blessedness of Christian marriage. Through the inevitable problems that arise in all marriages, each partner can learn to grow to greater maturity in Christ-likeness.

For further study on the duties of husbands and wives, see Gen. 2:15-25; Prov. 19:13; 21:9, 19; 27:15-16; 31:10-31; 1 Cor. 11:3; 13:1-8; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

Sex in Marriage

God is the one who invented sex, and He obviously created it for pleasure as well as for procreation. The Bible, however, plainly states that sexual relations are to be enjoyed only by those who have joined themselves together in a life-long marriage covenant.

Sexual relations that take place outside the bonds of marriage are classified as either fornication or adultery. The apostle Paul stated that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Although a Christian might be tempted and might possibly commit an act of fornication or adultery, he will feel great condemnation in his spirit that will lead him to repentance.

Paul also gave some specific instruction regarding the sexual responsibilities of husbands and wives:

But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

These verses make it very plain that sex should not be used as a “reward” by either husband or wife because neither has authority over his own body.

Moreover, sex is a God-given gift and not unholy or sinful as long as it stays within the confines of marriage. Paul encouraged married Christian couples to engage in sexual relations. Furthermore, we find this advice to Christian husbands in the book of Proverbs:

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love (Prov. 5:18-19).¹

If Christian couples are to enjoy a mutually satisfying sexual relationship, husbands and wives should understand that there is a vast difference between the sexual nature of men and women. By comparison, a man’s sexual nature is more physical, whereas a woman’s sexual nature is connected with her emotions. Men become sexually excited by visual stimulation (see Matt. 5:28), whereas women tend to be sexually excited by relationships and by touch (see 1 Cor. 7:1). Men are sexually attracted to women who appeal to their eyes; whereas women tend to be sexually attracted to men they admire for more reasons than just physical attractiveness. Thus wise wives look their best to please their husbands all the time. And wise husbands show their affection for their wives all the time by hugs and thoughtful acts of kindness, rather than expecting their wives to be “turned on” in an instant at the end of the day.

A man’s degree of sexual desire tends to increase with the build-up of semen in his body, whereas a woman’s sexual desire increases or decreases depending upon her menstrual cycle. Men have the capacity to be sexually excited and experience sexual climax within a matter of seconds or minutes; women take much longer. Although he is normally physically ready for actual intercourse in seconds, her body may not be physically ready for as much as half an hour. Thus wise husbands take their time in sexual foreplay with caresses, kisses and manual stimulation of those areas of her body that will result in her becoming ready for intercourse. If he doesn’t know where those parts of her body are, he should ask her. Additionally, He should know that although he has the capacity for reaching only one sexual climax, his wife has the capacity for more. He should see that she receives what she desires.

It is vital for Christian husbands and wives to discuss their needs honestly with one another and learn as much as they can about how the opposite sex differs. Through months and years of communication, discovery and practice, sexual relationships between husbands and wives can result in ever-increasing blessedness.

Children of a Christian Family

Children should be taught to be submitted and fully obedient to their Christian parents. And if they will, long lives and other blessings are promised to them:

¹ For more proof that God is not prudish, see Song of Solomon 7:1-9 and Leviticus 18:1-23.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (which is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3).

Christian fathers, as heads of their families, are given the primary responsibility for the training of their children:

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Note that the father's responsibility is two-fold: to bring his children up in the *discipline* and *instruction* of the Lord. Let us first consider the need to discipline children.

Child Discipline

The child who is never disciplined will grow up to be selfish and rebellious toward authority. Children should be disciplined any time they *defiantly* disobey reasonable rules that have been established beforehand by their parents. Children should not be punished for mistakes or childish irresponsibility. They should, however, usually be required to face the consequences of their mistakes and irresponsibilities, thus helping to prepare them for the realities of adult life.

Young children should be disciplined by means of spanking, as God's Word instructs. New babies, of course, should not be spanked. This does not mean that babies should always be given their own way. In fact, from the day of birth it should be clear to them that mother and father are in charge. They can be taught at a very young age what the word "no" means by simply restraining them from doing what they are doing or about to do. Once they begin to understand what "no" means, a light slap on their buttocks will help them understand even better during those times that they don't obey. If this is done consistently, children will learn to be obedient at a very young age.

Parents can also establish their authority by not reinforcing undesirable behavior in their children, such as immediately giving them what they want every time they cry. To do so is to teach children to cry in order to gain their desires. Or, if parents yield to the demands of their children every time they throw a temper tantrum or whine, such parents are actually encouraging such undesirable behavior. Wise parents only reward behavior that is desirable in their children.

Spankings should not be physically harmful but should certainly generate enough pain to cause the disobedient child to cry for a short time. In this way, the child will learn to associate disobedience with pain. This the Bible affirms:

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently....Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him....Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you punish him with the rod, he will not die. You shall punish him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol....The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15).

When parents simply enforce their rules, they do not need to threaten children to make them obedient. If a child defiantly disobeys, he should be spanked. If a parent only *threatens* to spank his disobedient child, he is only reinforcing his child's continued disobedience. As a result, the child learns not to be concerned about being obedient until his parents' verbal threats reach a certain volume.

After the spanking has been administered, the child should be hugged and reassured of his parent's love.

Train Up a Child

Christian parents must realize they have a responsibility to train their children, just as we read in Proverbs 22:6: “*Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it*” (emphasis added).

Training involves not only punishment for disobedience but reward for good behavior. Children need to be consistently praised by their parents to reinforce their good behavior and desirable traits. Children need to be reassured often that they are loved, accepted and appreciated by their parents. Parents can convey their love by praises, hugs and kisses, and through the time they spend with their children.

To “train” means to “make to obey.” Christian parents, therefore, should not give their children the option of whether or not they will attend church or pray every day and so on. Children are not responsible enough to know what is best for them—that is why God gave them parents. To the parents who invest the effort and energy to see that their children are properly trained, God promises that their children will not depart from going the right way when they are older, as we read in Proverbs 22:6.

Children should also be given increasing responsibilities as they grow older. The goal of effective parenting is to gradually prepare the child for the full responsibilities of adulthood. As the child grows older, he should be given progressively more freedom to make his own decisions. In addition, the teenager should understand that he will accept responsibility for the consequences of his decisions and that his parents will not always be there to “bail him out” of trouble.

Parents’ Responsibility to Instruct

As we read in Ephesians 6:4, fathers are not only responsible to discipline their children but also expected to *instruct* them in the Lord. It is not the church’s responsibility to give the child instruction in biblical morality, Christian character, or theology—it is the father’s job. The parents who relegate all the responsibility to the Sunday School teacher to teach their children about God are making a very serious error. God commanded Israel through Moses:

And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and *you shall teach them diligently to your sons* and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up (Deut. 6:6-7, emphasis added).

Christian parents should introduce their children, from an early age, to God, telling them who He is and how much He loves them. Young children should be taught the story of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. Many children can understand the gospel message by age five or six and can make a decision to serve the Lord. Soon after (by age six or seven, and sometimes even younger), they can receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Of course, no ironclad rules can be laid down because every child is different. The point is that Christian parents should make the spiritual training of their children their highest earthly priority.

Ten Rules for Loving Your Children

1). Don’t exasperate your children (see Eph. 6:4). Children can’t be expected to act like adults. If you expect too much from them, they’ll quit trying to please you, knowing it’s impossible.

2). Don’t compare your children with other children. Let them know how much you appreciate their unique qualities and gifts from God.

3). **Give them responsibilities** around your home so they will know they are an important part of the family unit. Accomplishments are the building blocks of healthy self-esteem.

4). **Spend time with your children.** That lets them know they are important to you. Giving them material things is no substitute for giving them yourself. Furthermore, children are influenced the most by those who spend the most time with them.

5). **If you must say something negative, try to say it in a positive way.** I never told my children they were “bad” when they disobeyed me. Instead, I’d say to my son, “You’re a good boy, and good boys don’t do what you just did!” (Then I’d spank him).

6). **Realize the word “no” means “I care about you.”** When children always get their way, they intuitively know you don’t care enough to restrict them.

7). **Expect your children to imitate you.** Children learn from the example of their parents. The wise parent will never say to his child, “Do as I say, not as I do.”

8). **Don’t bail your children out of all their problems.** Only remove stumbling-stones; let stepping stones remain on their path.

9). **Serve God with all of your heart.** I’ve noticed that children of parents who are spiritually lukewarm rarely continue to serve God in their adulthood. Christian children of unsaved parents and children of fully-committed Christian parents normally continue to serve God once “out of the nest.”

10). **Teach your children the Word of God.** Parents often prioritize the education of their children but fail to give them the most important education they could get, an education in the Bible.

The Priorities of Ministry, Marriage and Family

Perhaps the most common error made by Christian leaders is that of neglecting their marriages and families due to devotion to their ministries. They justify themselves by saying that their sacrifice is “for the Lord’s work.”

This error is remedied when the disciple-making minister realizes that His *true* obedience and devotion to God is reflected by His relationships with His spouse and children. A minister cannot claim to be devoted to God if he does not love his wife like Christ loves the church, or if he neglects to spend the time necessary with his children to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Moreover, neglecting one’s spouse and children for the sake of “the ministry” is usually a sure sign of fleshly ministry that is being done in the power of one’s own strength. Many institutional pastors who carry heavy work burdens exemplify this, as they exhaust themselves in order to keep all the church programs running.

Jesus promised that His burden is light and His yoke is easy (see Matt. 11:30). He is not calling any minister to show his devotion for the world or the church at the expense of loving his family. In fact, a requirement for an elder is that he “must be one who manages his own household well” (1 Tim. 3:4). His relationship with his family is a test of his fitness for ministry.

Those who are called to traveling ministries and who must be away at times should spend extra time focused on their families when they are home. Fellow-members of the body of Christ should do what is within their power to make such an arrangement possible. The disciple-making minister realizes that his own children are his primary disciples. If he fails at that task, he has no right to attempt to make disciples outside of his home.