

***The Family: God's Servant***  
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**May 25, 2008**

What I'm about to tell you is a true story. Inez is a lonely 17 year old, pregnant from one of her one-night encounters. Her father used to beat the family, until he left when she was 8. Her brother is in Juvenile Hall. Her mother has a live-in boyfriend, a drunkard who hates her and her brother. "Get out!" he yells at her. On the street, the warm California sunshine embraces her, but gives no comfort. In desperation she contacts a crisis pregnancy center that places her in a home with a Christian family. Very immature, she sulks, withdraws, throws temper tantrums, and tries to manipulate them by her actions. The family gives her love and structure. Although she appreciates the love, she resists the structure, refuses to change and never responds to the good news about Jesus. The family perseveres, encourages her, and tells her she will not be able to handle her child if she does not mature. This young woman gives birth to a little girl. She insists she can make it on her own, gets a job and an apartment. However, she lives for parties, drinking, drugs and boyfriends. She goes to jail for possessing drugs and resisting arrest. While there the Christian family cares for her baby daughter. She places her daughter up for adoption through a Christian agency and begins to drift aimlessly, living out of her car. She moves from one temporary relationship to another and has another illegitimate child. In her mid-20s, she is already a bitter, broken woman.

Inez' opposite is Ken, a godly young man who is the son of missionaries. He learned of Jesus from his father and mother, through whose gracious, generous, godly, sacrificial love God planted a church in a foreign culture. Ken now works as a businessman in a country which officially prohibits all Christian activities. His friends love him and his testimony to them is powerful.

What was the most influential factor in how Inez and Ken each turned out? It was their families. But, you argue, surely God can overcome family backgrounds. You know godly individuals who grew up in a very ungodly family and you know ungodly individuals who had very godly parents. Yes, that is true, but it is also true that God's usual means of bringing people to faith and spiritual maturity is through the influence of a godly family and a Bible-believing church. And as you consider who you know that are strong, mature, godly Christians, you realize that that in most cases they are so because of the family that they grew up in.

We all recognize that children are the genetic images-bearers of their parents. You can look at your blue eyes or red hair or long nose and figure out which of your parents or grandparents gave you those features. But children are also the moral image-bearers of their parents. From a very young age children learn their attitudes and values by observing them in their parents. (George Scipione, *The Sword and the Shovel*, pp. 35-36)

This points out to us just how tremendously important the family is in our society. Stable families produce stable churches and stable nations. Unstable families produce church splits and chaos in nations. It also points out how important the family is in the salvation and spiritual growth of individuals. Families that evidence a love for God and a service to him are a strong influence in producing children that love God and want to serve him. Families that feel that God is unimportant raise children who also view God as unimportant in their lives. The family has such a vitally important role both in our society and in the spiritual development of individuals that it behooves us to spend some time studying what God has to say about the family.

### **I. Ordained by God – Gen. 2:18-24; Ex. 20:12, 14**

As we turn to the Scriptures, the first thing we learn is that the family was ordained by God himself. Gen. 2:18-24 tells us that God created the first man, Adam, and then declared "*It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*" Why was it not good for man to be alone? From the rest of Scripture we can think of a number of reasons why it is not good for man to be alone. When King David

was alone, his heart turned to lust and he committed adultery with Bathsheba. The presence and influence of others in a family is a great and good hindrance to sinful thoughts and behaviors.

But here we see that God said it was not good for Adam to be alone even before mankind had fallen into sin. God determines to make a helper for Adam. Here we see that every individual in this world needs companionship, that is friendship, someone to talk to, to plan with, to share with, and secondly every individual in this world needs assistance, that is, someone to help us figure out how to do things and to bring them about. God arranged for mankind to have companionship and assistance by creating the first woman, Eve, and by joining the two of them together in marriage.

I will have much more to say about marriage later in this series, but I would like to begin the series by looking at the broader institution that God created when he joined Adam and Eve together in marriage. By bringing them together God created the first family. Chapter 4 tells us that God also gave children to Adam and Eve and that they too were part of the family.

These children were not sent out to raise themselves. God brought them into the family as little babies, unable to care for themselves. They too needed companionship, especially in the form of love, and they too needed assistance in order to grow both physically and spiritually.

Since sin was already in the world when they were born, they were also very much in need of supervision and discipline to teach them right from wrong. Our society often operates on the false idea that children are born good or at least neutral. The Bible tells us that such is not the case. Children are born with a sinful nature. If their sinful nature is not restrained, and if they are not trained in moral behavior, they will turn into criminals. A few years ago we read of how two young teenagers in Britain beat a 5 year old boy to death. A little later we read of young teenagers in Cleveland, OH., who had been left to largely raise themselves. They formed a mob without morals, and when an adult insulted them, they chased him down and murdered him. The parents of these children failed their children. Even when a family does not know God, the family structure has the potential to be a powerful influence that trains children to be civilized. Strong families are needed, because the family restrains evil and criminal behavior.

The family as God designed it is uniquely equipped to raise children. The very different gifts and abilities of a father and mother provide a loving and stable environment for children to grow up to be moral and productive contributors to society.

I want you to also notice that the family was the first institution that God created. It wasn't until much later that the civil government and the church were created. The family is the foundation for both the church and the state. Both the church and the state derive their authority from the authority that God placed in the family. The family is also the training ground to provide leaders for the church and the state. It is the minor league where potential church leaders and state leaders are seasoned as they learn loving leadership and the roles of management. I Timothy 3 requires that a man be a good manager of his own household before he be allowed to hold office in the church. And in the early days of our country, when Massachusetts and Virginia were colonies, they required that a man be a church officer before he allowed to hold office in the civil government. A man had to prove himself in the home in order to hold office in the church. And he had to prove himself in the church in order to hold office in the state.

Many in our society today argue that the family is no longer necessary. They argue that we have outgrown it, that it is time to redefine it as two men or two women with children, or as one man with many wives. But we must remember that the family is not an invention of man. God ordained that the family be one man and one woman with the children that he provides through birth or through adoption.

The family is not something that was arrived at by accident. God ordained it and established laws that protect it. In the seventh commandment God forbid all sexual relations other than that of a husband to a wife, and in the fifth commandment God commanded children to honor and obey their parents.

Many have tried to do away with the family. In fact, all who hate God try to destroy the family, because it is such a strong influence for godliness in the world. Karl Marx and the USSR tried to get rid of the family.

Their efforts created such a tremendous disaster that in the 1930s the USSR established legislation to protect the family in order to keep their state from falling apart. And in the 1990s the USSR was willing to put up with religion in order to get morality into their schools and into their children. They asked Christian school teachers from America to come and teach in their schools.

The family does many valuable things for the state. It civilizes children and produces a stable citizenship. It produces leaders for the state. It remains the controlling model for how the state and citizens will treat each other.

Jonathan Edwards was a Puritan minister in early America. He was a godly man who preached and taught the truths of God's Word. When a study was done of his descendants, it was found that his descendants included 14 college presidents, 100 college professors, 100 ministers, 100 lawyers, 60 doctors, and numerous authors, editors and other people who contributed much to society.

Max Jutes was a convicted criminal in early America. When a study was done of his descendants, it was found that they included 7 murderers, 150 criminals, 150 drunks, and 310 who died as paupers. The cost to the US government in the 1800s for the trials and incarceration of his descendants amounted to \$16 million dollars.

The family must be maintained at all costs. It is right and necessary for the state to protect the family. It is right and necessary for Christians to work to protect the family as God has designed it.

But if we are to reap the benefits of the family as God intends for us to do so, we must give careful thought to how to strengthen our families. The family is a very good organization for training children, because the children are raised and influenced by adults who love them and seek to teach them what they have learned through life.

The American public school system is a very poor organization for training children, because it segregates all children by age. While there is no harm in having children of the same age spend some time together, a serious problem develops when children spend all their time with children who are their same age, day after day, week after week, year after year. This turns peer pressure into a very powerful influence in their lives. Even if their teacher is a very godly person, the teacher's influence is overruled by the much greater influence of the peer pressure. The children do not learn their values from adults who have a wealth of experience. Rather, they learn their values from other young people who are as undisciplined and untaught and as ungodly as they are.

Churches into the same bad habit when they segregate children from adults in all their meetings and activities. Again, there is not a problem with having children spend time with other children their age, but when they are always separated, the influence of wise adults is diminished and the influence of foolish and ungodly young people is greatly increased. That is one reason that our church includes children in worship, and has combined fellowship, and encourages parents and adults to come to our children and youth activities.

If you hear a young person say, "But I don't have anything in common with an older person," then say to them: "That is why you need to talk with them. They have so many things they can teach you." Adults, I urge you to fellowship with children as well as other adults. Take time to talk to and develop friendships with all the children and young people in the church. They need your guidance.

## **II. Reflection of God – Eph. 5:22-33**

I have spent a lot of time on the importance of the family and the fact that it has been ordained by God for the instruction and training of children. But we don't want to limit our appreciation of the family merely to what it can do for our society. We also want to look at the role God intends for it to have in raising Christian children.

Ephesians 5:22-33 tells us that the family is a model or reflection of God. The God-given role of the husband and father is to exercise loving leadership toward his wife and children, and to protect and

provide for them. As he does so, he models the character of God and the love of Jesus Christ to his wife and children and the unsaved world. He shows them how good and loving God is, and what a wonderful protector and provider God is, and what a wonderful Savior Jesus Christ is. By doing this, the husband and father makes the Gospel attractive. By doing this he also becomes more and more like God. And in doing this, he shows people how they are to become like God.

The God-given role of the wife and mother is to become a submissive helper to her husband. She uses her gifts and talents to aid him in his work of providing for the family and managing the family. She takes on a major role in teaching and training the children to be godly individuals in the church and the state. The very fact that God calls her a helper indicates that the husband and father is not adequate for this task by himself. He needs the gifts and talents that God has given her to complete his task. And as the wife uses her gifts and talents for the aid of her husband and good of her children, she models the role of the church. She shows her family and the world how to honor God by submitting to Jesus Christ, and how to serve God and advance his kingdom in the world by using all of our gifts and talents in such a way that we are constantly advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this world.

The children too are a model or reflection of the very nature of God. The love of parents for children shows the love of God for his people, and the obedience of children to parents models the obedience that we, the people of God, are to give to our God.

God said to Adam: *"It is not good for man to be alone."* (Gen. 2:18) God's appointed means of removing loneliness and providing companionship is marriage and family. Marriage and family provide the companionship and fellowship that men and women and children are in need of. The church as the family of God is meant to provide spiritual fellowship for people. Our earthly families, and the church as God's family, are both models of the fellowship and companionship that has existed within the Godhead for all eternity. Adam's need for companionship was not due to sin. He had this need before he ever fell into sin. Companionship is part of God's design and intent for us. God wants us to learn from marriage and the family that he desires to have an intimate fellowship and companionship with us.

In all these aspects that we have considered, marriage and the family show us what God is like, what he intends for us to be like, and the kind of wonderful blessed relationship that God desires to have with us.

### **III. Sanctified by God – Mal. 2:14-15; Eph. 6:1-4**

Finally, let us consider the means by which the members of the family become more and more like God. This sanctification is the work of God in the hearts of individuals. But God does not choose to work in a vacuum. He chooses to use the earthly family as one of the major means through which he does his work.

God calls on parents to teach and instruct their children in the truth. They are to discipline them when they act in sinful manners. They are to train them through repeated practice to develop godly character traits in their lives. They are to model a godly life before them. And they are to pray with and for their children. All of these actions are resources for raising children to know and love God. I will examine each of these resources in another message.

For now I simply want to show how important to God it is that we as parents seek to raise our children to know and love God. Mal. 2:14-15 says: *"... the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring."* Here God declares that one of the reasons he created marriage was that he desired for husbands and wives to have children. This does not mean that God will enable every parent to have children, or that children are necessary to have a family. Remember, Genesis 2 said that the primary purpose for marriage was companionship, not procreation. But the procreation of children is one of the purposes of marriage. God desires that we would have children.

And notice that God does not merely desire children; his desire is for godly children. God has united man and woman together in marriage and created the family, that parents might have the resources to raise

children that are godly, that is, children that are like God, that bear the image of God's holiness in their lives.

To that end, Ephesians 6:1-4 reminds children that there is one of the 10 commandments that has a promise attached to it. It is the fifth commandment, which says: "*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" (Ex. 20:12) Children are commanded to obey and respect their parents. And God's promise is that they will live long in the land. Ephesians 6:2-3 repeats this promise and applies it to Gentile families. This makes it clear that the promise was not limited to Jews and their dwelling in the land of Israel. While we might interpret the promise as merely a promise of long life, it appears to go beyond that and be a promise of eternal life.

Does this mean that children are saved by obeying their parents? No, it does not. But it does indicate that obedience to parents is a means to an end. Learning to obey your parents is a step on the road to learning to obey God. Ephesians 6:4 adds that each father must be careful not to frustrate his children by making it very difficult to obey him. Rather, parents are to train their children how to obey them and obey the Lord, that their children may reap the blessings of salvation and eternal life through the Savior, Jesus Christ.

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