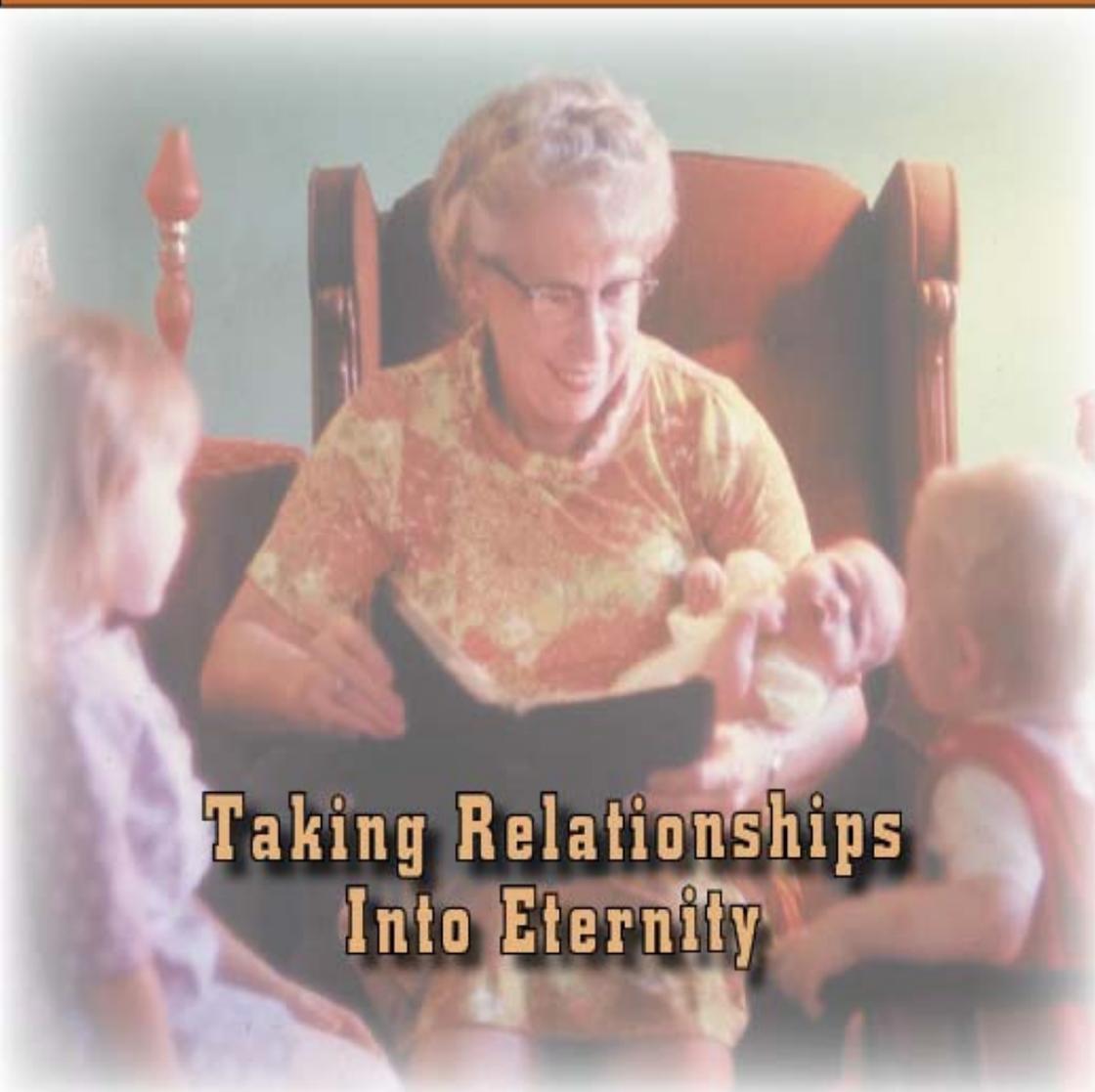


# **BUILDING ETERNAL RELATIONSHIPS**



**Taking Relationships  
Into Eternity**

**ROGER E. DICKSON**

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Cover Picture: Grandmother Dickson reading the Bible to grandchildren (1972)

# BUILDING ETERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

In a 1960s newsletter of the *Foundation For Human Betterment*, it was stated:

During the past forty years medicine has made tremendous progress. We have almost eliminated the bacterial diseases, such as typhoid fever, bubonic plague, and many others which in the past have wiped out huge segments of mankind. However, we have made very little progress in the so-called psychosomatic diseases, and by that we mean diseases that are caused by or are greatly influenced by wrong mental and emotional attitudes. We now know that the giant destructive emotions of hate, envy, jealousy, fear and guilt produce diseases just as certainly as do bacteria or poisons .... To put it bluntly, when a man harbors these destructive emotions he is slowly but surely committing suicide .... We know that the only way to get rid of these destructive emotions is to replace them with LOVE.

We live in a world that is plagued with diseased minds that destroy every social structure that is the foundation of humanity. In some places of our present world, the Holy Spirit could write the following concerning the social behavior of society: “*God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Gn 6:5). We seek to encourage those who live in this world—which is all of us—in order that we better cope with the evil of the world by following the advice of our God. Only in following the advice of our Creator will we be able to take ownership of a victorious life. When we follow Him, we wake up every day and thank Him that we made it this far. We continually remind ourselves of God’s directives that make us victorious in any hostile environment that at times seems so contrary to righteousness. Many societies of the world have gone wrong. But this does not mean that we must go wrong with the evil of our environment. As Christians, we are reminded by the evil of this world that this world is not our final home. We view the moral negatives of this world, therefore, as positives to keep our minds focused on that which is not of this world. Our teleology constrains us to focus on heaven. And by focusing on that which is good, we can be that small portion of salt that can preserve those around us.

## Chapter 1

### Starting With The Basics

*“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).*

The suicide bomber who straps on a bomb and blows up innocent people does not know the God of the Bible. The thief who breaks into and steals that which belongs to his neighbor does not love his neighbor as himself. Life today seems to be the definition of a loveless existence, and thus, the identity of a world gone wrong in human relationships. Nevertheless, our personal lives need not be patterned after the loveless character of a world controlled by Satan. We can be different. We can be so different that we can preserve ourselves through Jesus past this world. We can do this, however, only if we can discover the God of love who offered His Son as a love offering in order to bring us into eternal dwelling in His loving presence. For this reason, therefore, we long to discover this God and how we are to love Him and our fellow man.

Society in general has long forgotten the admonition of the true and living God of love:

*You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind .... You will love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37-39).*

Society in general does not get better. Satan does his work well, and thus, society always spirals down morally.

When God made the pronouncement of Noah’s generation that every imagination of the mind of man was only evil continually (Gn 6:5), He was, in a negative/positive sense, defining the nature of those who would reveal themselves as His children by their love for one another and Him. An unloving world provides the opportunity for God’s children, through their love, not to be identified with a morally degenerate world. Jesus explained:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:34,35).*

Jesus’ statement forces us to be positive in a world that always goes morally wrong. If all the world were loving, then there would be no possibility to define who the disciples of Jesus really are, neither would we have any visual evidence of the nature of the God of love. But the fact that the world is burdened with unloving people provides the opportunity for Christians to be identified as the people of God because of their love for one another. They have the opportunity to reveal the one true and living God by the loving nature of their lives that are patterned after the loving character of God.

Jesus' statement in John 13:34,35 assumed that Christians throughout their lives would dwell in unloving social environments, and thus, have the opportunity to reveal the love of God. **The loving Christian, therefore, is taking advantage of his unloving environment in order to manifest the love of God in his or her heart, and thus, reveal the true God of love in heaven.** The Bible statement is thus emphatically true: "*HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE DOES NOT KNOW GOD, FOR GOD IS LOVE*" (1 Jn 4:8). Those who perform wickedness toward their fellow man are atheistic in reference to the loving God that is revealed in the Bible. They are behaving wickedly according to a god they have created after their own wickedness.

If we manifest love for God and our neighbors, then it is by this love that we will be identified to be the children of the true God of love. We are sure that this thought was in the mind of Peter when he wrote:

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Pt 3:15).*

The love of a Christian should spark inquiry in the minds of the loveless in order that they ask for a reason concerning the hope of the Christian. A loveless society provides many opportunities to reveal the God of love.

There are actually four words in the Greek dictionary that are commonly

translated in English literature with the English word "love." Each Greek word reveals something unique about the relationship that the Greeks had with one another in their society. However, in the New Testament only two of these Greek words are used. In order to enlighten our New Testament definition of the love by which God is revealed and Christians identified, we will begin with the two Greek words that **are not** used in the New Testament, but were used in Greek society. All four words will give us some idea of the emotional relationship that existed between people of the first century. The last two words will help us understand better the relationship that the disciples of Christ should have toward one another and the God of love.

#### A. "Chocolate cake" love:

Most people have a passion for chocolate cake. Unfortunately, many of us can obsess over chocolate cake to the point of sitting down before a large chocolate cake and eating until we are sick. The obsessed eater reaches the point where he or she gags to take just one more bite of chocolate cake. Once the lust for chocolate cake is satisfied, the eating is over. Our passion for chocolate is satisfied, and with a sickened stomach, we move on.

The ancient Greek word *eros* would be used to define our passion for chocolate cake. The English word "erotic" comes from this word. This is erotic passion that once satisfied, moves on until the next time when a craving arises. The

Greek word *eros* is **never** used in the Bible.

In ancient times, the word *eros* was used often in reference to erotic sexual activity. It is the passion that is experienced for a moment, but then is satisfied. When the satisfaction is realized, the “lover” then goes on his or her way.

Eroticism is passion without commitment. In a marital relationship that is exclusively based on passion, one is focused more on one’s self than his or her partner. The use of the word *eros* in a marital context would explain that there are some dysfunctions in the marriage. *Eros* would be applied to the individual who has had a moment of sexual satisfaction, but then moves on to the appointments of the day. This would be a relationship that grows dim over time as the passion of the sexual experience fades from the marriage. Therefore, after the honeymoon is over, it is then the time to determine if the married partners truly love one another.

Some people grow tired of being married because the passion of the sexual experience of the marriage has faded away. In such cases, the couple may have been married only on the basis of a passionate sexual relationship. But when the passion of the sexual relationship has faded, then they fade from one another as partners. Their sexual *eros* was a weak foundation upon which their marriage relationship was initially established.

In the sexual activity of a world that lives in fornication, *eros* would define the sexual relationship between many men and women. This is erotic sex without

any commitments. Sexual encounters without any commitments defines a hedonistic society in which individuals seek relationships only for the purpose of satisfying their sexual impulses.

In a marriage relationship, two individuals have taken the first step in honoring a commitment to one another. Newly married couples must focus on their commitment to grow together for life, enjoying the sexual relationship as God’s blessing for the expression of love within the marriage. Jesus’ parable in reference to receiving the word of God illustrates too many young marriages. In the parable, Jesus identified those who initially were excited about receiving the word of God, but did not have a deep commitment to continue in their relationship with God.

*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and **immediately receives it with joy**. However, he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, **immediately he falls away** (Mt 13:20,21).*

This sounds like some marriages. Some people immediately receive the word (get married), but immediately fall away from the word when times get tough (when disagreements come). Those in the parable fell away from their relationship with Jesus because their passion for the Lord had no depth. It was shallow. It was initially based on excitement, but the excitement eventually passed away

when hard times came.

In his youth, John Mark may have had this initial burst of passion for the Lord. He sailed with Paul and Barnabas on their first mission journey. Unfortunately, the exciting passion that Mark initially experienced for the Lord was not strong enough to take him through all the trials of the journey for which he volunteered (1 Jn 4:18). He eventually turned back from the journey (At 15:38).

Fortunately, there is a happy ending to Mark's story. His initial passion eventually grew into a committed love that sustained his relationship with the Lord until the end of his life. Many years later, and while Paul was in prison in Rome, he called on Timothy to "*get Mark and bring him ..., for he is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Tm 4:11).

Mark's life illustrates the initial commitment of many young people to one another when they are first married. Marriage begins with love and erotic excitement, but then come the trials of stony places. Nevertheless, if a couple hangs tight, the initial *eros* (passion) of the relationship will eventually grow into a lifetime relational love that will deliver great rewards in old age. "Chocolate cake" passion alone for one another will not take a married couple to the rewards of marriage in old age. However, when the passion of two young people eventually morphs into sacrificial love, then the couple is on their way to holding one another's hand into an inexpressible love commitment until they part in death.

Passion will initially connect two people in marriage, but it takes sacrifi-

cial love to keep them connected until death do them part.

## B. "Uncle John" love:

This definition of love is inherent in the Greek word *storge*. This Greek word **is not** in the New Testament. In Greek society it was a word that was commonly used to express family relationships. Reference here is to a legal love. Uncle John is a relative, and thus, we must love him because he is a blood relative. And besides this, Uncle John gives out candy when he is around. We deeply cherish Uncle John, but our affection for Uncle John can be tested if he hangs around too much.

"Uncle John" love is as a trained nurse who is dedicated to a sick child in the hospital. She will give the child loving attention and care while she is on duty. But when she comes to the end of the day, she goes home to her own family. However, if one of her own children would become sick, then she would never leave her child.

Sometimes in marriage, the initial love of a couple digresses into a *storge* love for one another. It is love out of duty. The husband brings home the money, and the wife cooks the food. Everyone is doing their duty, but the deep loving affection for one another has long passed away. Marriage becomes a duty to perform, not a daily celebration of two people happily growing old together.

Christians sometimes manifest a *storge* love in reference to their Christianity. It becomes only a duty to be with

the saints. It becomes duty to study one's Bible, which duty is often neglected. We have an affection for our brothers and sisters, but we can take only so much of their company. It is sometimes as one brother said, "One can get too much of his brothers." The one who would make this statement has not yet grown in the love by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified before the world (Jn 13:34,35). He has not yet learned to love the brotherhood of disciples (1 Pt 2:17).

We can always know when one is about to give up on Christ. All that he does for Christ has become a wearisome habit of duty, rather than total commitment to Jesus. It was for this reason that John wrote, "*His commandments are not burdensome*" (1 Jn 5:3). When the worship of one becomes empty, then he is about to empty his seat in the assembly of the saints.

### C. "Football" love:

As long as one cooperates with the team and manifests the right attitude, he is on the football team. He can play ball with the rest of the team because he has a relationship with the other players. However, if a particular team member starts acting out of place, or is not playing in cooperation with the team, then he is kicked off the team. We throw off the team those who do not play fair, or those who do not have a cooperative relationship with all the team members.

The Greek word *phileo* is used in the New Testament. This is the friendship love. It is the love that focuses on

one's affectionate relationship with someone or some thing. It would be the friendship that is maintained as long as everything goes according to the conditions that determine a friendship relationship. Michal "loved" David as long as everything went according to the rules of friendship. However, when David behaved contrary to what she believed was appropriate behavior, she no longer "loved" him (See 2 Sm 6:20-23). She kicked him off her friendship team.

If this word were used in reference to the love that existed within a marital relationship, then the marriage would not last long. Everything in the marriage relationship would go fine until one partner did something that was contrary to the rules of the marriage game. When disagreements arose in the marriage, one partner would want to kick the other off the marriage team.

There can also be *phileo* relationships among members of the body. However, if the disciples' love for one another does not go beyond friendship, it might happen that in a time of disagreement one disciple might offend another, and then, kick the other disciple "out of the church." And then there is the preacher. He is a good man of God as long as he is a team member and does not preach any lessons that might offend any of the members. But if he preaches something that offends a member, then the offended member, who has only a *phileo* relationship with the church, will often kick himself off the team.

*Phileo* is used in the New Testament to explain many different relational sce-

narios. The hypocrites “love [phileo] to pray standing in the synagogues ...” (Mt 6:5). “He who loves [phileo] father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Mt 10:37). “Beware of the scribes who ... love [phileo] greetings in the markets” (Lk 20:46).

One’s association with another in Christ begins with a *phileo* relationship. But when one grows in Christ, the *phileo* relationship with other disciples must always progress to an *agape* relationship. It is the *agape* relationship that defines the relational nature of the body of Christ (Jn 13:34,35).

#### D. Agape (love):

This is the love that Paul defines in 1 Corinthians 13. It is the love that is defined by God’s love for us (Jn 3:16), love that reached out while we were yet in our sins. It is unconditional love. Paul defines this love in the statement of Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is unmerited love by which God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). In other words, this is the outpouring of love upon those who do not deserve to be loved. It is the love of God that is defined by the incarnation of the Son of God (See Ph 2:5-11). It was this action of God toward mankind that overwhelmed the apostle John: “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 Jn 3:1). This is not as the love of a young man who said on the tele-

phone to his young lady friend, “My love for you is higher than the tallest mountain. It is deeper than the deepest ocean, and wider than the widest river. And I will be over tonight if it does not rain.”

Agape (love) gives when it is not given to. It is love that loves when not loved. It is sacrificial even when no sacrifices are given in response. It works, but does not expect to be noticed. It gives, but does not expect to be given to. It always forgives before even being asked to forgive. It is the love that follows the instructions of Jesus, “But I say to you, love [agape] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44). The psalmist explained, “Hatred stirs up strifes, but love covers all sins” (Pv 10:12). “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (Pv 17:9). “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened ox with hatred” (Pv 15:17). And the Holy Spirit was right when He said through Solomon in explaining the loving devotion that should exist in marriage, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. **For love is as strong as death**” (Ss 8:6).

One of the interesting contexts where the words *agape* and *phileo* are used in the New Testament in a comparative manner is when Jesus called on Peter’s commitment after he had denied Him three times. “Simon, son of John, do you truly love [agape] Me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). Peter responded with the word *phileo*. “Yes, Lord, You know that I love [phileo] You” (Jn 21:15). But Jesus again asked, “Simon, son of John,

*do you truly love [agape] Me?"* (Jn 21:16). Again Peter responded, *"Yes, Lord. You know that I love [phileo] You"* (Jn 21:16). And then a third time Jesus asked the question using Peter's word *phileo*. *"Simon, son of John, do you love [phileo] Me?"* (Jn 21:17). It was when Jesus used the friendship word for love (*phileo*) that Peter was using that Peter got the point. *"Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time"* (Jn 21:17). He was grieved because he had denied Jesus three times. His denials were based on a *phileo* relationship, not an agape (love) relationship. Agape (love) would never have denied Jesus. This would be the love by which Peter would later love in order to be martyred for Jesus. When Peter would be old, Jesus said to him, *"You will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not wish to go"* (Jn 21:18). It would be then that Peter would understand that he had grown to the love of *agape* where he was

willing to die for Jesus.

Agape (love) is the mortar that holds the bricks together. It is the love that holds disciples one to another. It is the love that flows from one to another. When a magnet is left clinging to a piece of iron, the iron eventually becomes magnetized. When loving Christians hold close to one another, their love grows. Any relational function of the body of Christ, therefore, that does not keep each member close to other members, is dysfunctional. It is not a natural fellowship that is based on the extent of love by which the disciples of Jesus are to be identified. We wonder if this was not the problem among the Ephesian Christians when Jesus said that they had lost their first love (*agape*)? (Rv 2:4). John concluded,

*And now I urge you, lady, not as though writing a new commandment to you, but what we had from the beginning, that we love [agape] one another* (2 Jn 5).

## Chapter 2

### Learning To Love Again

We have just enough religion  
to make us hate one another,  
but not enough to make us  
love one another.

Jonathan Swift

A young teenager who thought he was in love with a fair maiden defined love: "Love is the feeling that flatters your ego while it flattens your wallet."

And then there was the weary housewife who had labored all day in cooking, cleaning and caring for a family. She had her own definition of love: "Love is a mental disorder that makes a girl eager to give up eight hours in an office to slave fourteen hours all day in a house."

Anyone who has come to the age of accountability recognizes that we must grow in our understanding of love in all

relationships of life. We struggle to learn the “second mile” love about which Jesus spoke (See Mt 5:38-47). We yearn for that love that was defined by Peter De Vries: “Loves blindness consists more often in seeing what is not there than in seeing what is there.” It is this love that is an emotional attitude that is not defined by the object upon which it is applied. It is as some poet once wrote:

It’s silence when your words would hurt.  
 It’s patience when your neighbor’s curt.  
 It’s deafness when the scandal flows.  
 It’s thoughtfulness for another’s woes.  
 It’s promptness when stern duty calls.  
 It’s courage when misfortune falls.

In modern times we have moved into a world where too many marriages end in divorce. We thus yearn to discover again that lost love that once bound marriages together until death. And in a chaotic world of dysfunctional societies, we long for a restoration of the divine principle that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Sane minds ache because we live in a world, that in the name of religion, foolish people feel justified to load a gun and kill innocent people on the street. Some feel compelled to execute those who do not conform to the god they have created after their own political agendas. We are thus driven in desperation to discover an emotional and spiritual loving relationship within humanity that is so necessary for survival in a mad world.

Just to refresh our minds, we remember what the conquering military French military leader, Napoleon, once said,

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires, but upon what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire on love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.

It is this love and devotion to our Lord Jesus that we seek to discover and implement in our lives as citizens of the world. Many years ago, Dr. Rene Spitz once surveyed an orphanage that was established in a South American city. It was his conclusion that one third of the babies who died in the orphanage did so because they received only one tenth of a mother’s love. The intolerance that we witness in our own world today can only be explained by citizens who have experienced little love in the homes from which they came. It is this love that Christian parents yearn to instill in the hearts of their children before they are sent as citizens into society. The chaos we experience in many societies today reveals that families are doing a very poor job of developing homes that produce citizens who love their neighbors as themselves.

So we yearn for the atmosphere of love that was poetically defined by Helen Steiner Rice:

Where there is love the heart is light.  
 Where there is love the day is bright.  
 Where there is love there is a song,  
 To help when things are going wrong.  
 Where there is love there is a smile,  
 To make all things seem more worthwhile.  
 Where there is love there’s quiet piece,

A tranquil place where turmoils cease.  
 Love changes darkness to light,  
 And makes the heart take wingless flight.  
 Oh, blessed are they who walk in love,

For they walk with God above.  
 And when man walks with God again,  
 There will be peace on earth for men.

## Chapter 3

### Growing Together

In the early years,  
 you fight because you  
 don't understand each other.

In the latter years,  
 you fight because you do.

Joan Didion

But Mark Twain was right when he said, "To get the full value of joy, you must have somebody to divide it with."

That which is most precious in one's old age is that the one seated in the chair next to you is the love of one's youth with whom you have grown old together. Throughout all the disagreements, the aged couple can find solace in the fact that they have endured to the time when both can experience the satisfaction that they made it together to the chairs in which they sit side by side in their old age. It is a surreal experience that aged couples can never in words explain to their children. It is something only the children can understand fully when they too get there themselves. It is for this reason that it goes without saying that Christians should marry Christians.

In his book, *30 Lessons for Loving*, that resulted from a survey of 700 elderly people, Karl Pillemer concluded,

Couples who have made it all the way later into life have found it to be a peak experience, a sublime experience to be together (*Time Magazine*, June 13, 2016).

Pillemer also added, "But all of them [aged couples] also either said that marriage is hard, or that it's really, really hard" (Ibid). Belinda Luscombe stated that to get to the end of a lifetime of marriage, it takes focus on the end result.

Marriage has become what game theorists call "a commitment device," an undertaking that locks individuals into a course of action they might find dreary and inconvenient on occasion in order to help them achieve a worthwhile bonus later on. And in an era when it's both harder and less necessary to stay together, the trick is figuring out how to go the distance so you can reap the surprisingly rich rewards (*Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

In many ways, Paul certainly had more in mind than financial relationships, or relationships with those who would compromise one's faith, when he said, "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has*

*righteousness with unrighteousness?*” (2 Co 6:14). Any relationship that a believer has with an unbeliever brings the believer into a contract with what could lead to the compromise of the believer’s faith.

When making a decision to make a contract of marriage for life, young people must seriously consider with whom they are signing on the dotted line on the marriage license. It is the love of one’s youth that must be remembered throughout a lifetime partnership in marriage. It is this affectionate love that Solomon sought to reveal to us in his loving relationship with the Shulamite woman. The Song of Solomon is a beautiful emotional ballet between King Solomon and a woman who had captured his sincere devotion. In the last verses of the poetic play, the Shulamite responded with her devotion to the king. Her words should be upon the lips of all those who would seek to grow old together in matrimony (See Ss 8:6,7).

**A. “Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm.”**

The signet (seal) in ancient times was worn as an identity by the one to whom someone had given his or her allegiance. It was usually worn around the neck, and thus, close to one’s heart. The Shulamite maiden wanted to be as close as possible to the heart of Solomon, and thus treasured by him. She wanted the signet of her devotion to him to be with him at all times.

The devotion of two people to one another is revealed in the New Testament

in reference to the responsibilities that two people must have to one another in marriage. The best counsel for successful marital relationships was given by the Holy Spirit in two statements: (1) *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as it is fitting to the Lord*” (Cl 3:18), and (2) *“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh toward them”* (Cl 3:19). In submission there is mutual respect between two parties. It is the husband’s love for his wife that draws devotion out of his wife. Regardless of the submission of the wife, true agape (love) is still showered on the wife. Agape (love) has no conditions. It is never a bargaining chip to be offered for a return. Submission and love in marriage define a mutual relationship. It is never an “I-will-if-you-will” interaction between a husband and wife.

When God’s relationship directives for marital relationships are violated, marriages will suffer, and eventually, society as a whole will reap the consequences. We must never forget that we are the creative product of our Creator, and thus, we must always assume that He made both man and woman to dwell in a harmonious relationship in marriage according to His emotional blueprint that is embedded within men and women. When society seeks to change the blueprint, then expect problems. When society seeks to rewire what God initially wired, then we can expect several social short circuits.

There is an extent to which both a husband and wife should maintain their roles as mates in marriage. As a wife

would submit to the Lord, so she must submit to her husband (Ep 5:22). *“Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything”* (Ep 5:24). There is also an extent to which the husband must love his wife. *“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies”* (Ep 5:28).

When a woman sets the seal of her love on a man’s heart, the natural response of the man is love for the woman. When the husband takes the initiative to love and cherish his wife, submission becomes a natural response. The Holy Spirit never gave any instructions in the marriage relationship that were not natural according to the emotional design by which we were created.

### **B. *“For love is as strong as death.”***

As sure as death will claim its victims (Hb 9:27), so will love claim success in a marriage. There are always times of disagreement in a marriage relationship. There are no perfect marriages. Sometimes arguments can become heated. But there is nothing greater to cool a heated argument than the words, “I love you, dear.” Death will certainly claim every human being. However, love will also claim its “victims,” for hard is the person who will not respond to unconditional love.

When in times of trying disagreements between a husband and wife, it would be good for both parties to remember the following words that were once spoken to them years before when they

were joined in marriage for life:

Wilt thou have this partner to be thy wedded wife (or, husband), to live together after God’s law in the holy estate of marriage? Wilt thou love her (or, him), comfort, honor, and keep her (or, him) in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, give thyself only unto her (or him), so long as you both shall life?

After remembering the statement, gaze upon the rings of the covenant that were exchanged with an “I do” as the response to the above statement. It is then that we realize that love is as strong as death.

In writing a book on relationships, C. H. Parkhurst wrote a chapter in his book entitled, “Love is a Lubricant.” He tells the story of a trolley car workman who always carried a can of oil in his pocket. When asked why, the workman replied, “I must always carry a can of oil in my pocket, for there are so many things that a drop of oil will correct.” In a successful marriage, we have always noticed an “oil can” in the pocket of each marriage partner. The oil can contained a mixture of love, patience and forgiveness.

### **C. *“Many waters cannot quench love”:***

Some translations of this verse read that flood waters cannot drown love. True love between a husband and wife cannot be smothered by trials that occasionally come along in a lifetime relationship. In fact, a couple cannot determine if they have a true love for one an-

other until it is tested with disagreements. And the married couple who says that they never had a disagreement, are not being truthful. We are human, and humans disagree. We are not all of the same mind as cloned individuals. Marriage is not a cloning process where either partner relinquishes his or her right to think to his or her partner.

Disagreements often come to light after the first few months of marriage. Once the passion of a sexual relationship cools, thinking, not passion, establishes a firm relationship. Disagreements subsequently separate passion from true agape (love). Once the honeymoon is over, it is then that the couple discovers their true love for one another. They know that they will both be there for one another. At the time of the marriage ceremony the two were pronounced to be one, but it takes the trails of marriage to fully understand their oneness. When both parties, who have established themselves as one in marriage, understand that neither are going anywhere during any heated disagreement, then the concrete of the marriage has set in.

We use the word “partners” in reference to marriage. However, we use the word with God’s definition of how two work together as one in a marriage relationship. There is a final decision-making process in a successful relationship, as well as mutual respect for one another when this God-ordained decision-making process is obeyed. When couples in marriage seek to work outside the realm of God’s definition of the function of each partner in marriage, then the “partner-

ship” is dysfunctional. When married couples adopt the thinking of the world in reference to partnerships, then we must expect worldly results in marriage, which often means that someone is “fired” from the cooperate board.

One of our Millennial Generation friends in America once asked us why it was so difficult for him to find a marriage partner. He was of a generation where single women were brought up to be professionals in the business world. They were trained “to be their own woman,” to think for themselves, and thus see marriage as a cooperate partnership that is defined according to the business world in which they would work professionally. There is nothing wrong with women being educated and successful in life. In fact, a healthy relationship in a marriage depends much on a husband who encourages his wife to be the best she can be with the gifts with which God has empowered her to serve as a disciple of Jesus. A husband who is intimidated with a wife who is very gifted must work on his own self-esteem. And working on one’s self-esteem does not mean that a woman is to be subjected in a manner by which she cannot exercise her gifts to the glory of God.

Unfortunately, the Millennial Generation is what many sociologists have called the “Me Generation,” that is, the generation that has been given everything, and thus, is trained with an abundance of toys and play things from childhood. The result is a generation that has been taught to think of themselves first and expect everything from others. Our

young Millennial male was finding it difficult to find a lifetime mate among women of his generation whose principles for marriage were according to biblical principles.

Our young friend had a great respect for the relationship that existed between his own father and mother, but unfortunately, his father and mother were married on the foundation of sound biblical principles. Our young friend had not yet found one of his own generation who manifested the biblically defined relationship that his father and mother had with one another.

We answered the question of our young friend that it is difficult for two “me” people to come together and make an “us” relationship. *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh”* (Ep 5:31).

The biblical principle of the preceding mandate of the Spirit was that the young man must to some extent disengage from his father and mother in order to have a healthy engagement with his wife. The reason this is necessary is that a young man must be committed to his wife. He must trust her knowledge and wisdom in decision-making. It is not the function of one’s parents to be making decisions in the marriage of their children.

Since the mandate of Ephesians 5:31 was made two thousand years ago, we assume that it has always been difficult for two young people to come together to form a marriage that is based on biblical principles.

The struggle our young friend was having is two-sided. He, as a “me” generation, had to give up some of his “me” in order to give himself in love to another “me” generation person, who also had to give up some of her “me” in order to submit to him as the head in a marriage relationship. Marriage is always “give and take.” But when both partners are trained from childhood to always take, then it is difficult for either partner to have enough to give. And in many cases when two “takers” come together in marriage, it is sometimes difficult for both to be satisfied with what the other has to offer.

In a love-submission relationship, there is always sharing, consideration, discussion, cooperation, giving and taking. A biblically conducted marital relationship has all these qualities simply because these are the qualities of a true disciple of Jesus. Christian marriage must always be defined in a manner by which each partner is encouraged to be a better disciple of Jesus.

**D. *“If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be scorned”:***

Remember the 1964 song of the Beatles that was entitled, *Can’t Buy Me Love?* The song writer revealed nothing new. The Shulamite woman said to her devoted lover, Solomon, that her love was not for sale. She recognized that Solomon, because of his great wealth, might be tempted to put a price on her love for him. If Solomon would have by chance tried to buy the love of the Shulamite,

then his love for her would not be true. Everyone would know that this “love” was based on that which was of this world. Solomon would be scorned for trying to buy the love of a woman, and the love itself would be insincere because it would have been purchase. Bought love has little chance of success.

True love can never be bought. It must be worked for and earned. A woman who would allow her “heart” to be bought by a wealthy man has cheapened her relationship with the man. The agape (love) that should characterize the relationship between a man and woman should never be labeled with a price tag.

There are different perspectives of the lobola that is “paid” for a woman in many African marriages. For those of the West who are not familiar with this historical practice that is commonly practiced out among many Africa tribes, lobola is the “price of a bride.” A young suitor who would marry a particular young maiden must pay lobola to the father of the bride, which is usually several cows. The number of cows is determined when the relatives of the young man negotiate with the father of the bride.

The practice of lobola has been judged by the West to be somewhat questionable because the West thinks the opposite in reference to preparation for the marriage of a young man to a woman. In the West, it is the desire of the parents to make sure that the young couple are financially secure in order to begin their marriage. They do not seek to “impoverish” the couple from the beginning of the marriage by demanding “payment”

by the future breadwinner at the very beginning of the marriage. But the West often misunderstands the lobola of African cultures.

It is true that some African fathers of brides are trying to reap a profit with their daughters in demanding, for example, ten cows, when a young man can give only five. But we must not overlook how the young man should view his love for the young maiden whom he would wed. The lobola is his expression of love. If the father of the young maiden asked for ten cows, and the young man was willing to give only one, then the young maiden would think, “Am I not worth more to you than one cow?” The giving of one cow would be an embarrassment to her worth as a woman and wife.

What is often not understood in reference to lobola is that regardless of how many cows the hopeful young man might give to the father of the bride, he will eventually inherit the father’s herd. The father of the bride is simply making sure that the young man builds up his inheritance, not leaving his daughter to live a poverty-stricken life with someone who has no ability to raise a herd of cows and provide for his grandchildren. Would this not also be the desire of a father of the West to see in the young man who would marry his daughter?

In the West, provision is made by the fathers at the beginning of the marriage in order to encourage the financial success of the young man. In Africa the fathers are trying to guarantee provision for their children at the end of their mar-

riage. It depends on whether one is viewing the financial security of the marriage at the beginning or at the end when the couple are in their old age.

And then consider the fact that the emotional energy that is needed to continue a successful marriage actually depends more on the man than the woman. Luscombe wrote,

One of the more controversial ideas therapists are now suggesting is that men need to do more of the “emotional labor” in a relationship—the work that goes into sustaining love, which usually falls to women (*Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

Drs. John and Julie Gottman published the result of forty years of research in their book entitled, *A Man’s Guide to Women*. They essentially concluded that **husbands must “man up” to their responsibility of being the primary sustainer in the emotional bond between a husband and wife**. They wrote,

What men do in a relationship is, by a large margin, the crucial factor that separates a great relationship from a failed one. This doesn’t mean that a woman doesn’t need to do her part, but the data proves that a man’s actions are the key variable that determines whether a relationship succeeds or fails (quoted by *Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

We would conclude that the science of human behavior is now discovering the biblical meaning of the husband as the head in marital relationships. In the

Bible, the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us that the man is wired to be the spiritual and emotional head (leader) in the marriage. However, headship is more about emotional and spiritual leadership than authority and rule. It is for this reason that women are always attracted to a man, who to the best of his ability, seeks to be in tune with the emotional needs of a woman. If a husband seeks truly to be the head, then he will sensitize his feelings to be in tune with the emotional needs of his wife. We do not know of any woman who would refuse to having her emotional needs lovingly nurtured.

Before marriage, a young man must examine whether he is able to emotionally lead the young maiden with whom he would be partner for life. His commitment to emotionally nurture a woman in marriage is not something to be taken lightly. How this commitment is made in a particular culture is based on how a commitment is made. When a commitment is made with more than words, as with lobola, the commitment is sincere. If a young African man does not keep his commitment, he will not get his cows back. We must never consider lightly the commitment that two make to one another in the bond (not bondage) of marriage. Think of the commitment in this way: The husband commits himself to be sensitive to the emotional needs of his wife. The wife in turn commits to submitting herself to his loving emotional sensitivity.

Someone once said, “Being someone’s first love may be great, but to be their last is beyond perfect.” It is al-

ways good to dream for the perfect love in marriage. However, it is always an impossible dream. It is impossible simply because we are human, and humans have a habit of failing. Therefore, it is not that a married couple never becomes angry with one another, or even irritated. The beauty of agape (love) is not in the problem of how quickly we might become angry with one another, but in how quickly we can resolve our anger and make up.

We must always keep in mind that a young man or woman will never find that perfect person to marry. The perfect mate does not exist. One should seek to find the imperfect person whom they see perfectly through love, just as God sees us as perfect through the blood of Christ. When one discovers the perfect person through love, then it is determined that that person is truly worth fighting for. The love of one's life is always worth "ten cows." Some church bulletin contained the following statement that young people might do well to memorize when looking for a lifetime partner:

### Perfect love

Slow to suspect ... quick to trust,  
 Slow to condemn ... quick to justify,  
 Slow to offend ... quick to defend,  
 Slow to expose ... quick to shield,  
 Slow to reprimand ... quick to defend,  
 Slow to belittle ... quick to appreciate,  
 Slow to demand ... quick to give,  
 Slow to provoke ... quick to conciliate,  
 Slow to hinder ... quick to help.  
 Slow to resent ... quick to forgive.

When in a time of confrontation, a married couple would do well to remember the following words that they uttered to one another many years before:

For as much as these two have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their oath each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring and by joining hands; I pronounce that they are husband and wife, **and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.**

## Chapter 4 Growing Into Eternity Together

We heard the joke about the aged man who bought what he thought were "youth pills." The first night after purchasing the pills, and before he went to bed, out of desperation to be young again, he swallowed the whole bottle of pills. In the morning his wife kept shaking him to wake up. After some vigorous shak-

ing, the man rubbed his eyes, but grumbled, "Ok, Ok, I'll get up, but I don't want to go to school."

We remember one time in the kitchen on the Kansas farm many, many years ago that uas children we asked our father how old he was. He replied, "40." All of us children gasped and responded,

“That is so old!” A person of 40 is old to some, but young to others, depending on which side of 40 you are. A person of 60 starts to reconsider that his father was not that old when he died at 80. We just never want to be considered “old timers,” regardless of how old we are. Nevertheless, we must all remember the words of the Holy Spirit:

*The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they are fourscore years, yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away (Ps 90:10).*

We seem never to be ready for that day when we “fly away.” Nevertheless, we must remember the words of James: “*For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (Jas 4:14). We must always live as if we were about to vanish away into eternal dwelling. It is for this reason that old age is a beautiful thing when in the company of one with whom the promise was made many years before, “‘Til death do us part.” But until that time when either partner “flies away,” it would be good to reconsider some precious concepts that will preserve one’s youthful attitude until the flesh takes its first steps to dust—no “youth pills” needed.

#### **A. Be old in flesh, but not in spirit.**

It was Shakespeare who said,

Some men never seem to grow old for

they are always active in thought, always ready to adopt new ideas. They are never chargeable with fogginess; satisfied, yet ever unsatisfied; settled, yet ever unsettled. They always enjoy the best of what is, and are first to find the best of what shall be.”

They are as Paul wrote, “*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Co 4:16).

Paul surely felt age slowly creeping upon his body, but he would never allow the inevitable wasting away of his flesh to damper his spirit. We have seen those who are old in spirit when they were only 30. But we have also witnessed those who are 60 to be 30 in spirit. The old proverb is still true: “You are as old as you think you are.” There is divine revelation behind this statement. For the “aged youth” we would resort to the following encouraging words of God:

*He gives power to the faint. And to those who have no might, He increases strength. Even the youths will faint and be weary, and the young men will utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint (Is 40:29-31).*

The word “age” must apply only to the body, but never to the state of one’s spirit. If one would preserve a youthful spirit, then he must not leave his dreams behind as his body ages into its evening

years. His mind must always be nursed with the invigoration of hope of what yet lies in the future. If our dreams are dead, our hope will grow cold, and we will no longer look forward to great things. If hope is old, then our mind is old. If the fire of ambition has long cooled, then our spirit has aged. But aging does not have to be this way. We must remember the following words of a poet:

If from life you take the best,  
And if in life you keep the jest,  
    If love you hold;  
No matter how the years go by,  
No matter how the birthdays fly,  
    You are not old.

O. H. Tabor gave some very good advice for those who let down their guard in old age, and subsequently, relinquish themselves to becoming old in spirit. You can know if your mind is old, Tabor wrote, when the following starts to characterize your attitude and behavior:

- When you start making something out of nothing and allow your imaginations to build the wrong images of others.
- When you are easily annoyed by little things that should be disposed of in a Christian sort of way.
- When you are afraid to face up to the future and dread what may lie ahead.
- When you lose interest in life and look to the past most of the time.
- When you withdraw from others and want to shut the door of your life.
- When you find yourself growing more critical of others, especially the

young people.

- When you look on the dark side of life most of the time and feel mistreated and unloved, and find you are becoming bitter and sour.

We might find ourselves in those words somewhere, and thus have allowed the spirit of being cranky to come into our attitudes. If so, then we have proven true what Solomon wrote, that “... *the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’*” (Ec 12:1). But this does not have to be the character of our inner spirit. Solomon’s “evil days” were only evil because in old age this is how some people view their lives. But “evil days” exist only in the minds of those who have grown old in spirit.

## **B. Stay young in spirit.**

If one finds himself with the spirit of the “evil days” in mind, then he does not have to remain in the bondage of despair. Life is too short to spend time on wishing we were young again, and then become cranky in spirit during the rest of our few years on this earth. Whether we are 40 or 80, we must think positive. We must not be surprised that age will bring its marks in the flesh, but this does not mean that fleshly marks that come with years be accompanied with marks in the spirit. We must not have remorse over those things in the past for which God has already dealt to us a bountiful portion of grace and forgiveness. We must be as Paul when he was sitting in a

cold prison cell in Rome: “... *one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before*” (Ph 3:13). These are wise words to the aged. But he was not finished. “*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 3:14). To Paul, the past had passed. His focus was on the future. Because he never lost his vision of good things to come, he was worthwhile for God’s business until the end of his life. An aged body may hinder our mobility to put ourselves in the presence of others, but if we maintain a youthful spirit, others will seek to put themselves in our presence.

The key to maintaining a spirit of youth is to focus our interest on something that is worthwhile to others. We must never pity ourselves in whatever portion of trials that life has dealt to us. We must always count it with all joy when we fall into different trials (Js 1:2), knowing that our faith must be tested to the day we die (Js 1:3). For this reason, we must never give into troubles and fears. In order to guard oneself from being critical of others, we must always keep our minds on saying something good about others. We may make ourselves feel good by griping about the government or others, but doing such only encourages our spirit of negativity. And the more negative we become about life, the less others will desire to be in our presence.

Worship is the cure for negativity, for in worship one focuses his mind on the One who gave all for us. Worship is

inherently encouraging. It refocuses our thinking off ourselves for a moment in order to concentrate on the God of all creation. Worship is the best medicine for those who have been stricken with the virus of negativity. We once attended a small assembly of saints in a house in Cape Town, South Africa. Before the assembly, in came an aged sister who needed someone on each side to bring her broken body to a seat in the assembly. Regardless of her apparent physical disability, she had a continual smile on her face. Her spirit was delightful. She had learned the secret of how to maintain a spirit of youth through worship. After struggling for two city blocks to make it to a seat of relief in the assembly, she forgot all her aches and pains for a moment as she poured out her heart in thanksgiving to the One who would eventually give her a new body (See 2 Co 5:1-10).

### **C. Eternal relationships must be nourished.**

Every Bible student remembers the aged Anna. She was at least 84 years old, but continued her ministry at the temple. She served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Lk 2:36,37). She had discovered the secret to growing old with a good spirit. One is never too old to serve, for in serving, as worship, one is focusing on others. Anna may have been somewhat immobile, but she still served God. She was the embodiment of the promise of God in Psalm 92:12-14:

*The righteous will flourish like the palm tree. He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of our God. They will bring forth fruit in old age.*

Emmanuel Kant was in his 70s when he wrote *Anthropology*, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. The Italian opera composer, Guiseppe Verdi, was 74 when he produced the masterpiece, *Otello*. At 80 he produced *Falstaff*, and then at 85 the famous opera *Ave Maria*, *Stabat Mater* and *Te Dum*. At 79 Oliver W. Holmes wrote *Over the Teacups*. At 83 Alfred Tennyson wrote *Crossing the Bar*. Productivity has no age limits.

When in one's aged years, it is a time to be proud, not regretful. In one's latter years he or she must remember, "*With the aged is wisdom, and in length of days understanding*" (Jb 12:12). "*The gray head is a crown of glory, if it is attained by the way of righteousness*" (Pv 16:31). It had to have been some aged person who remembered the preceding words of the Bible when he or she wrote,

Let me grow lovely growing old,  
So many fine things to do;  
Silks and ivory and gold,  
And laces need not be new.  
There is healing in old trees,  
Old streets a glamour hold.

Why not I as well as they,  
Grow lovely, growing old?

The responsibility of the aged couple is to help one another grow old gracefully. A tender nudge, a patient word, and a loving smile will signal years together and spiritual growth. It is not as Agnes and Andy. Agnes complained to Andy, her aged husband, "You haven't said you loved me for years." Andy responded, "I told you I loved you when we got married. When I change my mind I'll let you know."

When an aged couple arrive in the twilight of their years together, their words are more custom made to express every thought. Barbs have been filed from words of disagreement. Roads that led to disagreements have been posted with signs that read, "Road Closed!" The beauty of aged couples is that they have learned to fine tune their communication in order to make their relationship carry them on the road that ends in eternal dwelling. Heaven will be much sweeter when they recognize one another in their eternal rocking chair. At the age of 70, the best advice I can leave for the aged is to wake up every morning with goals to do, knowing that this will be the best day of your life . . . considering the prevailing physical circumstances.

## Chapter 5

### The Sanctuary For Survival

*And a brother will deliver up [a Christian] brother to death, and a father his*

*[Christian] child. And the children will rise up against [Christian] parents and*

cause them to be put to death (Mt 10:21).

It is necessary to understand the context of Jesus' above statement in order to understand why we have inserted the word "Christian" before those who would be delivered up. In the context, Jesus had just stated to His disciples, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt 10:16). These wolves will "deliver you up to councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues" (Mt 10:17). The Christians would "be brought before governors and kings **for My sake**" (Mt 10:18). And then He forewarned them, "You will be hated by all men for My name's sake" (Mt 10:22). Jesus was picturing a sociological environment in the days of the Roman Empire when the home would digress to the point that family loyalties would vanish. It would digress to the point that unbelieving parents would deliver up their believing children, and unbelieving children would deliver up their Christian parents.

In his monumental six volumes entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) concluded that there were seven major reasons why the Roman Empire came to its demise with the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. One of the seven reasons was the "devaluation of the home," which "devaluation" Jesus foretold in Matthew 10.

According to statistics in America in 1870, 1 in 34 marriages ended in divorce. In 1900, 1 in 12 marriages ended in divorce. In 1930 it was 1 in 6 marriages, and by the 1970s it was 1 in 2.

But the good news is that since the 1980s divorce in the American society has declined, except among older people. *Time Magazine* reported that research "in 2014 found it [divorce] has doubled among people 50 and older in the past two decades; more men over 65 are divorced than widowed" (*Time Magazine*, June 13, 2016).

Many people think that marriage will work itself out automatically. But that does not seem to be the case. It takes a lot of hard work to make a marriage work and a home successful. As socio/economic conditions of today take both the husband and wife out of the home, it is increasingly difficult to bring both back home to sustain a healthy marriage relationship, and a family that nurtures children who are assets to a healthy society. Unfortunately, in many cases it is true what the aged preacher Marshal Keeble once wrote, "There is no such thing as juvenile delinquency. It's parental. That's the problem. The children are doing pretty good considering who's raising them."

The American, John Howard Payne, had lived in Paris, France for over nine years. He was extremely homesick for America. In 1822 he wrote the words,

... 'mid pleasures and palaces  
we may roam,  
be it ever so humble,  
there's no place like home.

The home should be a place where the strife of the world is shut out, and love locked in. It should be a social en-

vironment where those who have been put down and bullied by the world can be lifted up to mountain peaks; where the small can be considered great. As someone once said, the home is “the father’s kingdom, the mother’s world, and a child’s paradise.” The home is a paradise where we have the opportunity to grumble the most, but are treated with respect, not criticism, for our opinions. It is a paradise where our stomachs are filled, and our hearts are comforted. It is truly as the preacher wrote, “The only place on earth where the faults and failings of humanity are hidden under the sweet mantle of charity.”

The biblical prescription for a successful home is clear. The husband (father) is the primary lover (Ep 5:24,28), the provider (1 Tm 5:8), the trainer (Pv 22:6; 29:15; Ep 6:4), and the spiritual and emotional leader (Pv 21:9; Ep 5:23,24; 1 Tm 3:4; Ti 2:5). No, it is not as someone said, “Home is the only place where a man can do as he pleases ... when his wife is away.” Neither is it as the Ghanaian proverb: The husband is the head, but the wife is the neck.

In the home, the wife (mother) is a lover (Ti 2:4), and a helper (Gn 2:18), and keeper (Ti 2:5). There are beautiful women about whom we hear. And there are career women and sophisticated women. And then the modern reference is to be the liberated woman. But we hear little about godly women who are the keepers of homes. In the home, the husband/father may run the show, but the wife/mother, as the keeper of the home, should make sure that she is writing the

script according to God’s rules. Successful homes produce successful societies.

In many societies today, street gangs are a sociological function of the youth. Gangs exist because homes have failed. Too often the gang has become the new home for those young people who come from dysfunctional homes, or no homes at all. It is often as someone said, “Kids are on the streets today because they don’t want to stay at home by themselves.” When both parents are forced into the work place of the urban environment, then responsibility for the children becomes second place. It is not surprising that when the children are nurtured by the environment of humanistic schools, the father and mother are both off to work and home late, that the home becomes only a place through which family members pass on their way to somewhere else.

Since God instituted the home for the procreation of the world, and the social environment to produce citizens for society, then we would naturally assume that He would lay down correct rules for successful family life. And He has. We are only kidding ourselves to think that we can violate His rules for a successful home, and then not pay the price, both in our homes and in society. Any dysfunction in society can always be traced back to some failure in the home.

John R. Mott once reported on the family of the world renowned Andrew Murray, a South African. He reported that in the family of Murray there were eleven children who grew into adulthood. Five of the sons become preachers and

four of the daughters became the wives of preachers. Ten grandsons became preachers and thirteen grandchildren became missionaries. There is power in the Christian home to preserve the world.

The beauty of a house is harmony.

The security of a house is loyalty.

The joy of a house is love.

The plenty of a house is in children.

The rule of a house is service.

The comfort of a house is God Himself.

Frank Crane

## Chapter 6

### Refocusing The Family

*Behold, children are  
a heritage of the Lord,  
and the fruit of the womb  
is His reward.*

*As arrows are  
in the hand of a mighty man,  
so are the children of one's youth.*

(Ps 127:3,4)

We have experienced in life more than we desire to remember concerning the following scenario that was written in a long-forgotten church bulletin:

A telephone rings in the middle of the night. The caller weeps uncontrollably. A teenager is ... dead. Hearts are broken; there are no words that bring comfort; comfort flees into the night; all advice is not relevant. A funeral happens; final "good-byes" are whispered in the ear of broken parents; classmates mourn; friends grieve. God is blamed; and everyone cries out, "WHY?"

Some churches lose their young people to the wilderness of sin at such a rate that they fabricate any type of appeal to keep them drawn to something

that somewhat reflects the spiritual side of man. Regardless of all the efforts to "keep our children," many children simply wander off into the wilderness. These wandering young people often look back and say, as our good childhood friend said to his mother, "I want to experience life." And sometimes that experience ends in a shocking call in the middle of the night.

#### A. Why do young people wander?

The psalmist wrote, "*Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward*" (Ps 127:3). B. Linda Mayhue wrote,

What a responsibility—to know that our children will build a life on what we teach and the love we show them. No wonder parenting is a job that brings more joy and challenge than any other.

Children are like arrows in the hand that we propel toward the target of life. The psalmist continued, "*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one's youth*" (Ps 127:4). Children must be launched from the

home toward the target of heaven. In order to accomplish this feat in parenting, parents must have a clear vision of the target. It is more than speaking the words of heaven. It is living the example by which children can be a designed arrow for direct flight. The sure way for parents to direct their children toward heaven is to make sure that they are going in the same direction.

We repulse in horror when we read of child abuse. But we must remember that the one who is guilty of abusing children was also the child of some parents who had no clear vision of heaven. The parent's ungodliness was only perpetuated through their children who in turn abuse their grandchildren. Perpetrators of child abuse were created in a dysfunctional home. When we dig deep into the dysfunctional home of a child abuser, it is easy to see that the abuser was someone born out of a home of abuse.

## **B. Restructuring the factory:**

We often hear that an automobile company must recall several thousand of their vehicles, if not millions that they produced at their factory. The reason for the recall is to correct a dysfunctional part in the manufactured product. The dysfunctional vehicles often resulted in accidents, some of which may have ended in the death of the vehicle occupants. The factory, therefore, must be remolded to correct the dysfunction in the products.

The same is true in society. If we wake up one day and discover tragedy in society, we must first focus on that which

produces the products for society. It is the home that produces citizens for our society, and when the home is producing dysfunctional citizens, then society must take another look at the home and do some remolding. Unfortunately, there is no recall of those children who have been released into society. They must live with the dysfunction of their parent's home. However, this does not mean that their own homes must continue the dysfunctions of the home from which they came. A new home can always begin a new heritage of the family. The Lord Jesus can do wonders in molding a great family.

When parents bring their children to Jesus, they have brought them to One who can mold them for life and direct them to the target of eternal glory. Jesus once rebuked His own disciples when they rebuked some parents who were bringing their little children "*to Him so that He might put His hands on them and pray*" (Mt 18:19). Jesus had just reminded his disciples about the preciousness of little children:

*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him that a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mt 18:6).*

It would be good for parents to research this statement, for it may be the parents who are hindering their children from coming to Jesus. Jesus' invitation to children is explicitly clear. Parents, grandparents and relatives must work as

a unified force to bring the children to Jesus. Bringing a child to Jesus, while the child is in the home, is not a guarantee that the child will remain faithful to Jesus when he leaves the home. The parents who have worked the best they could to keep their children close to Jesus in the home, are not responsible for any wayward child after the child has left the home. Leaving the home means that children are responsible to God for their own behavior. There is no parental responsibility that guarantees the faithfulness of children once they are on their own. When the Bible speaks of each one giving account of himself before God in judgment, it does not mean that the parents will give account for the sins of wayward children (See 2 Co 5:10).

### C. Writing road maps:

We know the well-known exhortation of Solomon: “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*” (Pv 22:6). It may be that a well-trained child takes a misguided walk in the wilderness, but when he is old he will remember the values that were implanted in his behavior when he was a child. The problem is when parents do not implant a spiritual road map in the minds of their children. If the young person wanders off in the wilderness of this world, it is difficult for him to find a spiritual road map back to God if the parents did not implant in his mind spiritual values.

The first responsibility of parents is to give their children a spiritual road map

that will bring them back to God if they wander off the straight and narrow way. Parents who have not built into their parenting a spiritual road map for their children are spiritually endangering their children when they leave the home. If a spiritual road map is not instilled in the moral fiber of their children, they are constructing an arrow that will fly from the home in the wrong direction. The child, when grown, will find it difficult to find his or her way to God when he or she has no spiritual inclinations to seek God.

Parents must realize that respect for God and His word must be instilled in the minds of children when they are young. This is the only guarantee against developing a society where every imagination of man is only evil continually (Gn 6:5). If the word of God is not instilled in the minds of young people in the home, then when they leave the home the world will instill in their hearts its own set of values.

What destroyed Israel is the same that destroys societies today. God judged Israel, and thus condemned her to captivity for one reason: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” of My word (Hs 4:6). As parents, we encourage, if not demand, that our children learn a host of secular books in school in order that they graduate and be successful in life. However, we neglect to demand that they know the Book of Life in order to graduate into eternal life. When a biology book is worn with use, but a Bible lies in dust, then we can be assured that a young person is bound to develop a wrong arrangement of priorities in his or her life.

## D. Prepared for life:

This world is not going away soon ... maybe. Therefore, Christians will always live in a world that has gone morally wrong. And this world is very immoral (See Js 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15). In order to prepare our children for the world, we must not forget the fact that someone will be their teacher in reference to moral values. Parents have a choice as to who will teach them and what they will be taught. Because the world is a strong teacher, Christian parents must be stronger than this world. In order that our children “*shine as lights in the world*” (Ph 2:15), parents must remember that “*greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*” (1 Jn 4:4). Therefore, parents must teach their children the following strong mandate from the Holy Spirit: “*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If any loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 Jn 2:15).

Parents are often challenged with the competition of their local public schools. When parents send their children to public schools that are void of the word of God, they are sending them into an environment of humanism, and in this day, a science of men that is void of the existence of God. In their book, *The Evolution Conspiracy*, Caryl Matrisciana and Roger Oakland wrote,

... traditionally the school room has been an open forum of learning. Today it has become a pulpit for the aggressive conversion of impressionable minds. It is

the battlefield where war is being waged against the Judeo-Christian God, His principles, His morality, and the Bible (Sept., 1991, see Amazon Kindle).

In his book, *Humanism: A New Religion*, Dr. Charles F. Potter wrote,

Education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism, and every American public school is a school of Humanism. What can a theistic Sunday School’s meeting for an hour once a week, and teaching only a fraction of the children, do to stem the tide of the five day program of humanistic teaching? (See Amazon.com.)

Since almost all young people come out of families that are spiritually dysfunctional, we are sending spiritually dysfunctional youth into a lion’s den of secular humanism where spiritually is deemed mythological. A Sunday morning religion that offers only a brief spiritual encounter for a couple hours once a week has no chance of winning the war against five days a week in an environment of humanistic teaching. The only chance parents have in saving their children is in daily study of the word of God in their homes.

We now live in a religious world where many church leaders know little of the Bible. We are as Israel who grew ignorant of the word of God. They were led by spiritual people, but leaders who knew little of the word of God (Hs 4:6). It was not that Israel became irreligious. The Israelites maintained their religiosity, but refocused on gods they created

after their own imagination and religious behavior that satisfied the emotional hysteria of idol worship. Today, we are as them. When parents and their children show up at a “church house of Bible ignorance,” it is rare that they will hear preaching and teaching from the word of God. They cannot because those who are leading the religious clan have themselves long forsaken a love and study of the Bible.

These are the times of biblical ignorance in a multitude of misguided religions. We have long forsaken the time when church leaders used good sense from the Good Book in order to lead the people to Him only who is good.

### **E. Refocusing parenthood:**

Parents must move beyond the common statement that is often said to children, “Do as I say, not what I do.” Children need examples. We too often forget that we are teaching our children through two mediums of education: (1) We teach our children through oral instructions. (2) We teach our children through behavioral example. If parents lack in any of these two areas, they will reap the consequences through their children. Their children will either know what to do, but have no living example of how to do what they know, or they will follow the behavioral example of their parents, but not know why they are doing it. Atheists can have good families. But their children are not directed by their parents to an eternal dwelling with their Creator.

Young people must not be burdened with the task of sifting through parental dysfunction in order to find their way in life. If parents do not live up to what they teach, their children, after they leave the home, are constantly challenged to make decisions concerning good and bad behavior on their own. This should not be the responsibility of the children. Children must not be given the responsibility of sifting through our actions in the home in order to come up with what the Lord would have them do.

When our children leave the home, they must take with them two primary principles that will keep them focused in their lives:

- 1. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Mt 22:37).**
- 2. You will love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:39).**

With the guiding principle of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33), children are well prepared for life with the above two principles as the foundation for their behavior.

Parents must remember that the Bible is their best friend. There are nugget principles for child rearing throughout the Bible. Someone said, “Rearing a child is like drafting a blueprint; you have to know where to draw the lines.” It is the Bible that has already drawn the lines for child training.

A young teenage daughter asked if she could go to a recently released adult

movie. But the mother drew a line. She said “No!” The daughter responded to the mother, “All the other parents are allowing their children to go.” As the mother continued sweeping the kitchen floor, she picked up a handful of garbage that she had swept into a pile and threw it in the salad of the noon meal. She then said to her daughter, “I suppose that if you don’t hate garbage in your heart you shouldn’t mind it in your stomach.”

Parents must always remember the exhortation of the Holy Spirit: “*Be not deceived, evil company corrupts good morals*” (1 Co 15:33). There was once a man who had a canary who would sing a beautiful song. So he decided to hang the cage with the canary outside his window to enjoy the company of the sparrows. The sparrows thus became the neighbors of the canary. It did not take long for the canary to learn to sing only, “Cheep, Cheep, Cheep.”

There is an exhortation from the Bible we must not forget: “*Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.*” (2 Co 6:17). And, “*Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good*” (Rm 12:9). Goethe said, “Tell me with whom thou art found and I will tell thee who thou art.” Solomon has not yet been proven wrong in the statement: “*He who walks with wise men will be wise,*

*but a companion of fools will be destroyed*” (Pv 13:20).

Parents must first talk to God in prayer about their children, and then they must talk to their children about God. God gave Israel a great mandate for parenthood in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, in which were the following words:

*And you will teach them [commandments] diligently to your children and will 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* (Dt 6:7).

Now before we become cynical of our own generation, consider the following words:

Children now love luxury, have bad manners, contempt for authority, show disrespect for their elders, and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants and not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their partners, chatter before company, gobble up their dainties at the table, cross their legs and tyrannize over their teachers.

**Socrates**

**Written around 475 B.C.**

## Chapter 7

# God's Manual For Parenthood

In order to keep Israel on the road of righteousness, God gave the parents of Israel specific instructions on parenthood in reference to guiding the nation in the right direction. The system by which parents were to implement these instructions is given in the context of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. If the parents maintained God's educational system by which they should teach their children the law of God, then the nation would be preserved in the land of promise.

In Deuteronomy 6 are instructions on how Jewish parents were to impart the commandments of God to their children. In Deuteronomy 11, God explained the reason why the parents of Israel were to be so vigilant to instruct their children in the word of God. Moses recorded,

*Therefore, you will keep all the commandments that I command you this day so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you go to possess it; so that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land that flows with milk and honey (Dt 11:8,9).*

Failure to be obedient to the commandments of God, therefore, meant that they would not be able to possess the land, as well as retain the possession of it after the land was conquered. Their obedience to the law of God was neces-

sary for them to function as the nation of God in order to be a beacon of obedience to the world that they were God's people. If they forsook the law of God, and went after the gods of the nations around them, then their purpose for which they were called to be a nation would no longer be valid.

As Israel among the nations, Christians live in a world that is hostile to the will of God. It is imperative, therefore, that Christians take a firm stand for the word of God in order to survive as the spiritual Israel of God. Unfortunately, the majority of the physical Israel of old eventually forsook the word of God (Hs 4:6). The result was that the Israelites were scattered among the nations, from which only a faithful remnant returned. The Jewish nation lost her identity as the people of God in the land of Palestine. If Christians today become ignorant of the word of God, they too will lose their identity as the people of God. They will be religious, but they will have no claim to being called Christians. They may do many wonderful works, but they will only be "Lord, Lord" religionists who have forsaken the commandments of God (See Mt 7:21-23). Since Israel is God's example of warning to the church today, then we too must expect that only a remnant will remain faithful (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

In order to guard against the unfortunate destiny of apostasy, the following

statements of Deuteronomy 6 are the Spirit-inspired educational manual on how Hebrew parents were to teach their children in order to preserve their identity as the people of God. If we fail to follow these instructions, the church too will become as Israel of old who departed from the word of God. The Hebrew writer warned, *“Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Hb 3:12).

### A. Teach diligently the word of God.

Moses instructed that the parents *“teach them [the commandments] diligently to your children”* (Dt 9:7). Before two people are married, this is one of the agreements to which they must first commit themselves. When children come into the family, both parents must be committed to teaching their children the word of God. Though one parent can be successful in the task of teaching the Bible to the children, when there are two on the teaching staff, the task is much easier.

In the case of Timothy, it was only Timothy's mother, Eunice, with her mother, who assumed the role of teaching the word of God to her son (Tm 1:5). No credit is given to Timothy's father for being a believer (At 16:1-3). Though it is best to have a team of teachers to impart the word of God to the children, sometimes the mother or father must struggle alone if one is an unbeliever. In the case of Timothy, the mother was successful in imparting the word of God to

her son from the time Timothy was a child (2 Tm 3:15), to the time an apostle came by and called him into ministry (At 16:1-3).

The use of the word “diligent” in the instructions of Deuteronomy 9:7 means that the parents must put their minds to this task. If parents believe that sports and school activities are more important on the list of training their children than the word of God, then God's word will take second place in the lives of the children. If parents believe that secular education is more important than spiritual education, then they will develop children who arrange the priorities of their life according to what the parents deemed most important in their lives. Parents must require of their children regular Bible study and memorization of the Scriptures. As in secular education, assignments in Bible study are in order. Greater diligence must be placed on Bible learning than on any other learning in the home.

It is interesting to note the difference between the *King James Version (KJV)* translation of the Greek text of 2 Timothy 2:15 and other translations. The *KJV* reads, *“Study to show thyself approved unto God ....”* The word “study” is not in the Greek text. However, the meaning of study is strongly assumed in the text, though other translations retain the literality of the Greek text with the following translation: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God.”*

If one were to rightly divide the word of God as a diligent workman for God, then certainly he must study the word of God. **A diligent workman for God has no idea how to work unless he diligently studies his Work Manual.** This is the reasoning behind the translation of the original *KJV* translators. Diligent workmen diligently study in order to rightly determine what the Boss would have them do. Those parents who are diligent students of the word of God will diligently teach the word to their children in order that they follow God's instructions on living.

## **B. Teach the word of God in the home classroom.**

The inspired manual for parenthood continues in Deuteronomy 6 with the following instructions: *“Talk of them [the commandments] when you sit in your house”* (Dt 6:7). In the field of secular education, “home schooling” has become a worldwide environment where millions of children are taught by parents outside the public school environment. For centuries, the home has always been the primary classroom for successful education of children in the word of God. In fact, when parents started giving their children over exclusively to the Bible class teacher, the education of children in the word of God diminished. Deuteronomy 6:7 emphasizes the home as the primary environment in which children are to be taught the word of God. The primary teachers are the parents. The Bible class at the local assembly of the saints must

always be in second place as the Bible school house.

The best environment in which children can be instructed in the word of God is when the family is together in the home. The problem that is facing many Christian homes today is that Christian parents have delegated all teaching of the Bible to their children to those who are outside their own homes. The instructions in the statement of Deuteronomy 6:7 means that parents have the responsibility of teaching the Bible to their children in the home. Parents are the designated teachers. Other teachers outside the home are only blessings who should support the teaching of the parents in the home.

We live in an era where every sort of entertainment has been invented in the assemblies of churches. If one would ask the parents of these assemblies why some have gone to such extreme systems of entertainment, they would unanimously state that they wanted to “save their children.” Most of these parents have failed to follow the instructions of Deuteronomy 6:7. Most have often failed to have daily Bible study in their homes from the time their children were small children, and thus, they have turned to “saving their children” through some concert assembly outside the home. They fail to understand that the necessity for the “entertainment assembly” is the last resort to keep their children because they have failed to teach their children in their homes.

It is the responsibility of the Christian home to impart Bible knowledge to

the next generation of citizens of every society. It is advantageous to have public Bible classes outside the home, Bible schools and Vacation Bible Schools. But if there is no Bible teaching in the home, then the success of public Bible teaching of the children will always be limited.

Albert Taylor once said, "One percent of the child's time is spent under the influence of the Sunday School; 7% under the influence of the public school; 92% under the influence of the home." Now who would have the greater influence over the children in the matter of influence and teaching?

The Christian's home must be the primary school environment for the children. And in this school, the word of God must be the primary textbook. It must be this way from the time the children can listen to their parents reading the word of God to themselves, to the time the children eventually leave the home to start another home Bible school in their own home.

### **C. Teach the word when you walk.**

God continued His instructions in Deuteronomy 6 with the following: "*Talk of them* [the commandments] ... *when you walk by the way*" (Dt 6:7). Not only is Bible teaching to take place in the home, it must also to be a characteristic of the parents' interaction with their children when they are outside the home. Moses' mandate is that the parents spend time with their children in and out of the house when they are instructing their children

in the word of God.

The instructions of Deuteronomy were written to the people of a farming culture. When the parents were in the field with their children by their side, there was to be Bible instruction. Unfortunately, modern families in urban environments have moved into a more challenging schedule in reference to parent/child relationships outside the home. A frustrated parent once said, "Most homes nowadays seem to be on three shifts. Father is on the night shift; mother is on the day shift, and the children shift for themselves." Nevertheless, the instructions of Deuteronomy encourage parents to focus on their children in Bible teaching regardless of where the children are.

Since many live in the modern urban world, and not a rural farming culture, then it takes special efforts on the part of parents to fulfill the mandate that parents teach their children as they "walk by the way." It takes planning for parents to be with their children outside the home in a manner where the word of God can be taught. Parents should plan work days together, vacations together, sports together, and any activities that will allow them to live an example of Bible teaching, as well as speaking the word of God to their children. At times the parents need to plan travel or outings together when it is only the father, mother and children as a family unit. This means that a family must be by themselves without the influence of others. This also means that each parent should plan to have personal one-on-one time with each child of the family. When parents de-

velop a means by which they can walk with their children along the way with a Bible in hand, then they are on their way to preserving a spiritual heritage for their grandchildren.

#### **D. Teach the word of God at night.**

Moses continued that the parents talk with their children about the word of God when they lie down at night (Dt 6:7). This means nightly reflection on the word of God and prayer. Timothy was blessed with a godly grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) (2 Tm 1:5). These two people passed on to Timothy a genuine faith that carried him throughout his life. The implanting of this genuine faith in his heart started when he was a child. Paul wrote, "... *and that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures ...*" (2 Tm 3:15). From childhood Timothy had been instructed in the word of God. We assume, therefore, that there was evening Bible teaching in the house of Eunice when Timothy was old enough to understand the Scriptures.

Night time is a precious time for Bible study. It is a time when the day is over and the family is in the quiet solitude of the home. It is a time when the last impressions of the word of God can be implanted on young minds as they slumber off into quiet sleep. Bible reading, Bible stories, spiritual songs, and a host of other Bible related activities can be experienced in the quietness of the evening as children find rest in sleep. The Bible is a source of sweet dreams.

Evening Bible teaching is a time of joy and reverence when the word of God becomes the center of attraction for the last wakened moments of the day.

We will always remember the family in the nation of Uganda with whom we stayed many years ago. This family was isolated in the country. There was no electricity, no batteries for radios, and thus, no radios. No TV, no cellphones, no internet, etc. There was no newspaper and no books in school for children. We asked the family with whom we stayed what they did at night when they came in from working in the fields. The father replied, "We have about two hours of spiritual singing, reading the Bible by candle light when we have a candle, and telling Bible stories." We might think this odd, but keep in mind that this was the way the world lived for thousands of years before people were "blessed" (or, cursed) with modern means of communication, or distractions. This was the way it was until the home became a place to go in order to get ready to go somewhere else. People actually sat down and looked at one another when they communicated, without some electronic communication device in their hands.

Some poetical parent surely wrote the following in reference to parenthood:

Before your child comes to seven,  
Teach him well the way to heaven.  
Better still the truth will thrive,  
If he knows it when he is five.  
Best of all, if at your knee,  
He learns it when he is three.

## E. Teach the Bible in the mornings.

Deuteronomy 6 exhorts parents to teach their children the commandments of God “*when you rise up*” (Dt 6:7). The morning is a precious time for Bible reading as children sit and eat their breakfast. Parents who start the day with their children around a feast of the word of God are giving them spiritual nutrition for the remainder of the day. Before the family launches into a world of unbelievers, the morning is a time to remind the children that their house stands for God. It is a time to remind the children of the stand that Joshua proclaimed before the nation of Israel.

*And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods that your fathers served on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in which land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Ja 24:15).

## F. Teach the word as a way of life.

In reference to the commandments of God, Moses mandated,

*And you will bind them for a sign on your hand, and they will be as frontlets between your eyes. And you will write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates* (Dt 6:8,9).

The phrase, “God Bless This House,” has been committed to countless designs and signs. It is a statement that

reminds everyone who steps foot in one’s house that the house is a place where God is and His word is studied. The blessed house is one where everyone who resides is reminded that a stand has been taken for God.

The word of God must always be before our eyes. It must be written on our doorposts so that everyone approaching our house will know that our house is dedicated to God. We must never forget that the devil makes good friends of parents in order to reach their children. Therefore, if we seek to rear up our children in the way that they should go when they leave the home, then we need to make sure that we are going in the direction we would have our children go. The Christian home is a launching pad from which godly people are launched into society. If we are disgusted with what we see in society, then we must remember that what we experience in society is the result of dysfunctional citizens that were produced in the home.

Many years ago on a Kansas farm, our mother always instructed us to be prepared in the home just in case Jesus showed up. She would say that we should always suppose that Jesus was coming to our house to spend a couple days, or maybe just come over and watch the ball game on TV. If He were going to spend the night, she stated that we would most assuredly give Him the best room in the house to sleep. And if He were to sleep in our bedroom, she asked what posters we would tear down from our bedroom walls.

Upon His appearing at our front

door, we would probably disguise our apprehension about having Him in our home by reassuring Him that we were happy to have Him in our company. When we first saw Him coming up to our door, we would probably rush around, possibly clearing some nasty magazines from the table, maybe hiding the beer and whisky. Would we hurriedly search for the Bible, dusting it off, and placing it in the middle of the coffee table in the front room? If we had time, we might even change our clothes into something morally descent. And then we would probably extract from the cassette player our worldly songs and put in the song, "Amazing Grace."

Our mother's point was that if Jesus were to come to our house to spend a couple days, would our life carry on as usual, or would we make some serious changes? Would we change our speech? If our house is dedicated to the Lord, then there should be no change if Jesus came

to visit us. The challenge of being a disciple of Jesus means that we conduct the affairs of our house in a manner that there should be no change of affairs in our lives if Jesus were to knock at our door.

Leo Tolstoy once said, "All happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is a difficult task, especially in these times when sin is so commonly accepted as a way of life (Pv 22:6). Teaching children to honor their father and mother takes a great deal of nurturing (See Ex 20:17). Teaching children to be receptive to the instructions of the Lord takes a life of parental example and teaching (See Pv 1:8). And teaching children to be obedient unto the Lord demands a strong committed example of Christian living on the part of the parents (See Ep 6:1-3). And sometimes it is still as Don Marquis said, "I would rather start a family than finish one."

## Chapter 8

### God's Instructions For Children

When we were in our early teens, and decided to get serious about knowing the word of God, we were advised to start reading the book of Proverbs. The advice was relevant to our needs in our youth. Proverbs is still one of the most favored Bible books for the guidance of young people.

The American writer and preacher, Alexander Campbell, once made a trip to Ireland and England in the middle nineteenth century. The promise of his eight-

year-old son was that he would quote to his father the book of Proverbs upon his return. Tragically, the eight-year-old son died in a drowning accident before Alexander's return. Nevertheless, at the time of his death, the son was ready to fulfill his promise to his father.

The book of Proverbs is filled with exhortations for young people. Throughout the Bible, there are many directives to help young people find their way in a world that offers so many distractions

from the right ways of God. The book of Proverbs is unique in that it was written by one, Solomon, who had so many material distractions in his own life. We would thus encourage all young people to meditate their way through the book. They should do so in order to find their way through a modern world of endless material distractions.

Before we launch into some of the more important concepts for youth in Proverbs, and in general the entire Bible, Solomon offered an admonition to all young people:

*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth. And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. But know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things* (Ec 11:9).

Young people must not forget to study the Bible in reference to finding guidance in their youth. They must be motivated to do such in view of the fact that they will give account of their behavior before God. If a young person is tempted to walk contrary to the will of God, then he should remember that he will eventually stand before God in judgment. Young people must remember, therefore, to “*put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity*” (Ec 11:10). The only guarantee for young people to keep their lives focused on God is that they give heed to Solomon’s final exhortation:

***Remember your Creator in the days of***

***your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”*** (Ec 12:1).

Paul was direct in his admonition of young people in reference to their relationship with their parents:

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

With this admonition directing the focus of their lives, the following are some Spirit-inspired instructions for young people to keep their minds focused on God:

- **Proverbs 1:8:** “*My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother.*” One of the purposes of the family is to produce obedient citizens for society. Only when the children adhere to the instructions of the parents, can this purpose be fulfilled. God’s ordained objective for parents, therefore, is to equip their children with behavioral skills that will enable them to function for the benefit of society. The primary textbook to source these skills must be the word of God, for only God has given the final word that will guarantee a society wherein every citizen loves his neighbor as himself. Solomon warned, “*Cease listening, my son, to instruction and you will stray from the*

**words of knowledge**" (Pv 19:27).

- **Proverbs 6:20:** "*My son, keep your father's commandment and do not forsake the law of your mother.*" In the preceding mandate of Proverbs 1:8, the emphasis was on the children hearing the instruction of their parents. In this statement, emphasis is on the children continuing in the parent's instructions throughout their lives (Pv 22:6). Children must not only listen to their parents in the home, they must also walk in the instructions of what they hear from their parents. It is worth noting that when Paul wrote, "*in the last days perilous times will come,*" he mentioned that those days, among other things, would be a time when children were disobedient to parents (2 Tm 3:1,2). Disobedience to parents is a sign of a society that has moved into a state of anarchy. Anarchy prevails when citizens rebel against the laws (instructions) of civil order. For this reason, children must learn respect for authority (law) in the home, before they move into society. Civil unrest, therefore, is often the evidence of failed homes.

- **Exodus 20:12:** "*Honor your father and your mother ....*" A civil society begins in the home. Children honor their father and mother through their obedience. They then carry this honor for authority in the home into the society when they leave the home.

The responsibility of the children to maintain the home is their obedience to their parents. Through their obedience to their parents they are preparing themselves for life. A disobedient child not

only breaks down the function of his family, but he is also preparing in his behavior to break down of civil order when he leaves home. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus quoted Exodus 20:12 of the Sinai law during His ministry to restore the Jews to the life-style that should be governed by the law of God (See Mt 15:4; 19:19).

When we witness civil disorder in society, we are witnessing the result of citizens who have graduated out of homes where children were not taught to respect their parents. Undisciplined children in the home will always lead to undisciplined citizens in society. When parents allow their children to show disrespect in the home, they are handing over to the police a dysfunctional citizen whom they must now discipline.

- **Exodus 21:15:** "*And he who strikes his father or his mother, will surely be put to death*" (Ex 21:12-17). The respectful relationship that children are to have toward their parents was clearly stated in this law for the Jews. Capital punishment was due to any child who would lay a hand on a parent simply because an undisciplined child in the home would lead to the destruction of society as a whole. It was best that the anarchist be stopped in the home before he or she brought ruin to society as a whole. In 1971, President Bokassa of the Central African Republic, celebrated one Mother's Day by executing all prisoners in the state prison who had committed some crime against their mothers.

- **Exodus 21:17:** "*And he who curses his father or his mother, will surely be*

*put to death*" (Lv 20:9). In the Jewish society, capital punishment was to be meted out on those children who even verbally showed disrespect to their parents. The reason for this was that any society will disintegrate into anarchy when children begin showing disrespect for their parents. When there is no respect for parents in the home, there will be no respect for civil authority in the streets. The next stage of this social digression into anarchy is when citizens start blaming civil authority for any efforts to bring disobedient children, who have left the home, under the control of civil law. A society that must have a strong police force to maintain law and order is a society where respect for law and order was not demanded in the home. Before one would argue with this truth, he must remember that Israel had no police force outside the home. The Jewish home produced citizens who respected the law of God.

• **Proverbs 19:26:** *"He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother, is a son who causes shame and brings reproach."* The disrespectful child brings reproach and shame on his parents because of his lack of respect for his parents. Rebellious children are a shame to the family. Young people manifest respect for their parents when they leave the home by continuing in their obedience of what was taught by their parents in the home.

Children must understand that their rebellion in the home brings shame upon the name of their parents. And in bringing shame upon the name of their par-

ents, they must remember that they will live with the same name upon which they brought shame in their youth. The disrespectful child will always live with the guilt of his disrespect until the day he dies. The rebellious child in his or her youth should remember that he or she is creating unpleasant memories of their childhood with which they will have to live the rest of their lives.

Regardless of the forgiveness of their parents, one will still remember the rebellion of his or her youth. The apostle Paul never forgot that he persecuted the family of God (1 Tm 1:13). However, he found solace in the grace of God. And so must rebellious children when they eventually wander out of the wilderness of sin.

• **Proverbs 23:24,25:** *"The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will have joy in him. Your father and your mother will be glad, and she who bore you will rejoice."* Children make their parents proud when they follow in the righteous instructions that were delivered to them by their parents. When they are old, children must remember that they will live with the guilt of their own disobedience toward their parents in their youth. For this reason, the wise child will seek to follow the instructions of his or her parents in order to bring joy to their hearts. A righteous son or daughter always makes his or her father and mother proud.

In contrast to disrespectful youth, we can only imagine how much joy filled the heart of Timothy's mother, Eunice, because he continued in the genuine faith

throughout his life that she had taught him from his youth (2 Tm 1:5). The inheritance of a genuine faith that Eunice passed on to her son was far more precious than any financial stocks and bonds that he may have inherited. Because he focused on faith in his youth, he could always remember spiritually obedient times with his mother who gave him a precious spiritual inheritance. When he left the home, Timothy had no guilt with which to deal in reference to his childhood.

- **Proverbs 15:20:** *“A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.”* The wise son is the one who has continued in the instructions of his father. This is the son of whom his father is proud. If one does not continue in the instructions of his parents, it is the same as despising the parents when he is on his own. Children who have left the home bring honor to their parents by continuing in the godly life about which they were instructed as children in the home. When children rebel against the godly instruction of their parents, they are living a life that despises their parents. A life that is contrary to the godly instruction of one's parents is a life that brings despite upon one's mother.

- **Proverbs 10:1:** *“A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”* A wise son is defined as one who continues in the instructions of his father. He is wise because he listens to his father. Solomon's definition of wisdom in the context of the preceding statement is when one listens to the instructions of one's parents.

The son who rebels against the godly instruction of his father brings grief to the heart of his mother. A godly mother will have a heavy heart in reference to a wayward child until the time of her death. A wayward child who does not perceive this, is selfish, disrespectful and unconcerned about the emotional well-being of his mother. The child's wayward life after leaving the home reveals his rebellion against the teaching of his father. His rebellion always affects his reaction to correction when he encounters in life opportunities to repent.

- **Proverbs 28:14:** *“He who robs his father or his mother, and says, ‘It is no transgression,’ the same is a companion of a destroyer.”* The skill of loving one's neighbor as himself begins in the home. A thief does not love his neighbor as himself. Theft, therefore, is always wrong because it is behavior that is contrary to the principle that one love his neighbor as himself. Simply because one takes something from a parent through theft still means that one is a thief. When theft is uncorrected in the home, a thief is turned loose on society.

Theft from a parent reveals disrespect for the parent in the home. It reveals disrespect for one's neighbor in society. If one believes that theft from a parent is not wrong, then he cannot have a civil relationship with his neighbor in society. Thievery becomes a culture. It is often learned in the home when children steal from their parents. They learn the culture of thievery in the home, and then, simply maintain the same behavior when they leave the home.

• **2 Timothy 3:15:** “... and that from a child you [Timothy] have known the Holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (See Dt 6:1-9). One of the primary functions of parents is to teach their children the word of God. If they fail in this function as parents, then the children will learn their behavioral morals from the world. And the world has always been a good teacher in teaching bad moral conduct.

Society digresses into moral chaos when the citizens are left to determine their own standards by which the citizens will morally relate to one another. Parents must never forget that “*it is not in man who walks to direct his steps*” (Jr 10:23). Since this is true, then it is imperative that parents instruct their children in the ways of God in order that their children have a God-ordained standard by which to make their journey through life. The atmosphere of the home must always be as some poet wrote:

How God must love a Christian home,  
Where faith and love attest,  
That every moment every hour,  
He is the honored Guest!

• **Titus 3:4,5:** “*The older women likewise are to be reverent ... so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, pure, workers at home, good, subject to their own husbands so that the word of God not be blasphemed.*” Herein is revealed the relationship that must exist between older and younger women.

At least the mother in the home should be teaching their daughters the principles of this verse. The heritage that mothers are to leave with their children is a genuine faith of life skills that will continue the godliness of the mother.

The wife of Isaac Goose, Mary, was born in Charleston, Massachusetts. She became well-known because of what she did for her children. Unfortunately, Mr. Goose died after Mrs. Goose had given birth to several children. She was left with the responsibility of teaching alone her children the principles of life that would guide them throughout their lives. So she wrote and sang to her children many nursery rhymes in order to entertain her children with moral principles. The rhymes, which were written in the seventeenth century, were eventually published by the son-in-law as the rhymes of *Old Mother Goose*. (Mrs. Goose died at the old age of 92 and is buried in the Granary Burial Ground, Boston, Massachusetts.)

If parents do not instruct their children in the word of God, then they are allowing their children to seek another teacher. In these modern times, this teacher is usually the public school, wherein is taught secular humanism. The product of such teaching is a world view that we are the product of evolution. This is a world view that is based on humanity being the result of an amoral process of evolution that is entirely different from the world view that is defined in the word of God.

We live with the consequences of societies that have given up on the word

of God as the moral basis of our moral relationship in society. Many societies today are thus suffering the same as Israel of old when she gave up the word of God (See Hs 4:6).

It is incumbent on Christian parents

to take spiritual ownership of their homes. Ownership is more than a deed to property. It is ownership of the spiritual future of their children. This is the inheritance they must pass on to their children.