

God's Blueprint For The Home



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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God's Blueprint For The Home

Lesson 1: God Has A Blueprint For The Home

Lesson: 2: God's Blueprint For The Home

Lesson 3: God's Blueprint For Marriage

Lesson 4: God's Blueprint For Husbands And Fathers

Lesson 5: God's Blueprint For The Wife And Mother

Lesson 6: God's Blueprint For Children

Lesson 7: God's Blueprint For Raising Children

Lesson 8: God's Blueprint For Character In The Home

Lesson 9: God's Blueprint For Communication In The Home

Lesson 10: God's Blueprint For Money In The Home

Lesson 11: God's Blueprint For Solving Conflict In The Home

Lesson 12: God's Blueprint For Restoring Broken Homes

God's Blueprint For The Home

Lesson 1: God Has A Blueprint For The Home

The “home” is nearly as old as mankind. The “home” is a vitally important part of society as a whole and is extremely impactful on each and every person who is living on this earth – either for the good or for the bad. Therefore, we have a great need to evaluate the kinds of homes we are building to see how we can build homes that have the most positive impact possible!

By “home” I simply mean the family. I do *not* mean a physical house that a person or family lives in. For, there are many people who have terrific houses but have terrible homes. And, there are many people who have inferior houses but have superior homes. So, the success or failure in one has no correlation to the other.

Many homes have failed because the members of the family have not attempted to build according to God's blueprint for the home. And, the consequences of this failure are wide-reaching. Every member of the home is negatively impacted by a home that is not built according to God's blueprint.

In contrast, every member of a home that is built according to God's blueprint is positively impacted. The benefits of this home are also wide-

reaching. However, there are few homes that have been built according to this blueprint.

Therefore, it is essential for us to look to the Architect of the home. As I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this lesson, God is the one who has designed the home perfectly. He is the one who has created it exactly how He intended and He is the one who has authority over it. Now, if we will just build according to His perfect blueprint, we can have homes that fulfill their true purpose and have the greatest impact on the world possible.

God Created The Home

God is the Creator and Designer of everything that is necessary for the home. He has created mankind and He has created marriage. Therefore, He is the only one who has the full authority over the home to regulate how it ought to function.

God created man

There could be no home if there were no people. So, we must go back in the Biblical record to the time of the creation. Genesis 1:26-27 says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Genesis chapter 2 helps to understand, specifically, how God created man on the sixth day of creation. Verse 7 says, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

So, the first piece of a home is in place. God has created man. But, a single man is not a home by himself. In fact, after God created this man, He saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Therefore, God created the second necessary piece of a home.

God created woman

Once again, Genesis 1:27 says that God created “male and female” on the sixth day of creation. Now, there can be no doubt that God created the woman *after* He created the man. But, it was still on this same day.

After God had made man from the dust of the ground, He proceeded to make woman. Genesis 2:21-23 says, “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.’”

Now, we have two individual pieces for a home: A man and a woman. But, as long as they are separate, they do not make a home. There must be something else involved. And, the answer is found in this same text.

God joined them together in marriage

Notice the text very carefully. After God created the woman from Adam’s rib, the Lord God “brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:22). In doing so, God performed the very first marriage and joined Adam and Eve together.

Genesis 2:24 states, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” They were not just two people who had *some* kind of relationship with one another in the Garden of Eden. Instead, they shared the closest of all earthly relationships as husband and wife.

Notice that God joined the two of them together and they became “one flesh.” Jesus would use this language in His own teaching on marriage in Matthew 19. He said that they were “no longer two but one flesh” and instructed, “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (verse 6).

Although they were still two separate people, God said that they were “one” in the sense of being united. They were not to live independent lives from one another. Instead, they were partners in life.

Subsequent verses continue to refer to Adam and Eve as being husband and wife. Whenever the serpent tempted Eve regarding the forbidden fruit in the garden, the woman “also gave to her husband” (Genesis 3:6). When God was identifying the consequences for sinning against Him, He told the woman that her desire would be for her “husband” (Genesis 3:16). When God began to speak to Adam about the consequences of sinning, He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you...” (Genesis 3:17). Then, “Adam called his wife’s name Eve” (Genesis 3:20). Genesis 4:1 says that “Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” And, “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth” (Genesis 4:25).

So, this was the very first home in the history of mankind – and God was its Designer (Architect). By the end of Genesis chapter four, we can see this home is composed of a husband, wife, and children. Although homes can exist even though a spouse dies or leaves the home, when adoption takes place, etc., we must recognize that this *traditional* style of home is exactly what God designed!

God has full authority over the home

As the Creator and Architect of the home, God is the one who has authority over the home. You see, in order for anyone to have *authority*, he/she must possess the power to control and the right to control a thing. Acts 17:24 says that God made the world and everything in it because He is “Lord of heaven and earth.” As the great Creator of the heavens and the earth and all things in them (including mankind and the home), He is the *only* one who has the full power to control and right to control the home.

Furthermore, as Judge of the world, God also will be the one who determines whether individuals fulfilled their roles in the home according to the blueprint He has given. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that we “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Certainly, this includes whether our lives meet His standard for how we must conduct ourselves in the home He has created and designed.

Therefore, whenever Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18), it applies to the home. There is nothing that is exempt from the complete authority of God and Jesus Christ, including the home. So, God is the one who has the authority to structure and regulate the home however He desires.

The Bible teaches us all about the blueprint God has for the home He created and designed. Our responsibility is simply to build according to this pattern. 2 Timothy 1:13 instructs Christians to “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Thus, this blueprint for the home that we can read about throughout the pages of the Bible is completely pure and right to lead us in the way that pleases God.

As a matter of application, this all means that it is only God who can define the duration of marriage. He is the only one who can tell us who is involved in a marriage that pleases Him. He is the only one who can rightly define the roles of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children. And, He is the only one who can perfectly teach us how we should raise our children.

God Created The Home For A Purpose

God created man and woman on the sixth day of creation. This was the zenith of His physical creation, as He created mankind in a very special kind of way. So, it is reasonable to consider *why* God saw fit to create the home rather than just creating the man and woman and leaving them separate so that they could figure out the rest.

The necessity of the home

I do not know how many minutes or hours passed between the time God created the man and the woman. But, I do know that in between the record of God creating the man in Genesis 2:7 and the record of God creating the woman in Genesis 2:21-23, a problem was observed.

As God created all things, He saw that everything He had created was good. However, Genesis 2:18 states, “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” This is the first statement of anything not being good. And, even then, the problem was not with what God had created. It was what He had *not* created.

In Genesis 2:19-20, we read more about this problem that God observed. All of the animals that had been created were brought to Adam to see what he would call them. As the animals came before him, he gave them names. But, in all of these, “there was not found a helper comparable to him.”

There was nothing else of a similar *nature* as himself. Not only did nothing else resemble him physically, but they were all missing the spiritual element to their existence that God created mankind with. Recall that Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Yet, when God brought the woman to the man, the man recognized that she was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23). He could see the resemblance! Then, God joined them together in marriage.

Now, take a moment to consider what God could have done to rectify this problem. He *could* have created another man. He *could* have created woman, but not join the two of them together in marriage. He *could* have created multiple women for the man. As the Creator of the universe, He *could* have done many things (even more than we could imagine). But, the fact that He did this *one* thing teaches us a great deal about the purpose of the home and how God desires for it to be arranged.

Physical purpose of the home

Man is a dual-natured being. He is physical and he is spiritual. Both of these natures have needs that must be fulfilled. And, it is largely through these needs that we can understand the purpose for which God has created the home.

Physically, man is a social creature and needs some form of companionship. So, one reason that God created the home is to provide for this need of a

companion to help him through life on this earth. And, although companions can be found in others, the physical relationships that are formed in the home provide the closest of all human relationships (especially between husband and wife).

Just think about Adam while he was naming all of the animals God had created. Whenever he saw that there was nothing else like him on the face of this earth, don't you think he probably felt lonely? So, God created a woman and joined her in marriage to him, as a "helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18). Now, they shared such a close relationship on this earth that it can be described as two becoming "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

They were the closest of partners who were to work together to take on the challenges of life. For, as Solomon observed, "Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Although Solomon was talking here about the general benefit of companionship, there is no greater application than having a life-long companion in a husband or wife! Now, neither one is alone in facing the struggles of life. There is a companion who is interested in your wellbeing. There is someone who is able to help you with the decisions that you face. There is someone who wants to help you succeed in living life on this earth!

A second physical purpose for the home is the fulfillment of sexual desires. Since mankind is a physical being, men and women have sexual desires. These desires are part of who God has created us to be. But, in creating mankind with these desires, He has also specified how these desires are to be used appropriately.

This is part of husband and wife being "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). They share in fulfilling these desires for one another. In fact, this is the *only* God-approved means of fulfilling sexual desires.

Whenever these desires are fulfilled in a God-approved marriage, it is a pure and wonderful thing.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Both the terms "fornicators" and "adulterers" have reference to those who do not fulfill their sexual desires in a God-approved marriage. Instead, they fulfill these desires outside of such a marriage. God will judge these people and they will be condemned to an eternity in Hell, according to Galatians 5:19-21 and Revelation 21:8.

So, it is a serious matter that pertains to your eternal salvation that you *only* fulfill these desires in a God-approved marriage! Therefore, God has said, "because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:2-5).

Finally, a third physical purpose of the home is to have and raise children. In God's creation of all living things, He saw to it that they would be able to reproduce after their own kind. For instance, on day three, God created grass, herb, and fruit tree that all produced seed according to its kind (Genesis 1:11-13). On day five, God created the sea animals and birds and told them to be "fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Genesis 1:20-23).

In the same way, when God created the man and woman on day six, He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This one-flesh relationship (and only this relationship) that the husband and wife have with each other is intended and designed by

God to produce children so that the world is populated.

Although children can (and often do) result from relationships outside of marriage, God has only authorized for children to be conceived in a home that consists of a husband and wife God has joined together. And, whenever these children are born, they are great blessings, as well as tremendous responsibilities and opportunities.

Psalms 127:3-5 says, “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.”

But, merely having these children is not all that God requires of parents. Instead, parents are expected to care for their children as they grow and train their children in the way they ought to live their lives on this earth. This involves nurturing care, instruction, and discipline. Proverbs 22:6 instructs, “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Spiritual purpose of the home

Since mankind is a dual-natured being, it would be a grave mistake to view the purpose of marriage and the home only by considering the *physical* purpose. Instead, since mankind is also a spiritual being who has been created in the image of God, we must also understand how the home works to fulfill man’s spiritual purpose.

To understand this point, we must first consider the purpose of every member of the family in light of their spiritual existence. Since we all possess souls that survive our physical deaths and that will exist throughout eternity, either in Heaven or in Hell, we must consider that the purpose of our lives on this earth is to live in a way that will please God so that we can all spend eternity in Heaven!

Solomon concluded his search for the true meaning of life by saying, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every

secret thing, Whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

In light of the judgment that all members of the family will face one Day when we all stand before Jesus Christ, the most important of all purposes of the home is to help each member of the family accomplish the purpose of fearing God and keeping His commandments! You see, not only is the home a place for physical companionship, but it is a place for spiritual companionship. For, the problem that Adam faced prior to the creation of the woman was not just that he could not find someone who *looked* similar to him, but that there was also no one who shared the spiritual element of his existence.

In fact, the greatest companionship that husbands and wives can provide for one another is to help each other make the decisions and take the actions that are pleasing to God and will result in each one spending eternity in Heaven! A great example of this is seen in Aquila and Priscilla (see Acts 18 and Romans 16:3-5). This husband and wife team worked together to help the apostle Paul, to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to allow a local church to meet in their home. 1 Peter 3:1-6 even gives instructions to Christian women to conduct their lives in such a way that they can win their unbelieving husbands to the Lord.

Then, the greatest responsibility parents and children have toward one another is to help each other live in a way that pleases God and will result in everlasting life in Heaven. This is especially true concerning the need for parents to train each of their children “in the way he should go” so that he will not depart from this way whenever he is older (Proverbs 22:6). Namely, the way each child should go is the Lord’s way, the straight and narrow road that leads to everlasting life in Heaven (Matthew 7:13-14)!

So, fathers are instructed to bring up their children “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Even mothers can have a crucial role in this work. For instance, it was Timothy’s mother and grandmother who worked diligently to teach him the ways of God (2 Timothy 1:5). You see, our children are one of the greatest opportunities for us to pass along the truth of God’s word in a way that it will impact future generations, so that our children

teach our grandchildren, who teach their children, who teach their children, etc. – all while each one is also trying to teach others outside of the family (2 Timothy 2:2)!

God's Blueprint Is Perfect

God created the home exactly as He intended to create it. There is nothing lacking in God's design and there is nothing that needs improvement or revision. The only question is whether you will follow God's perfect blueprint that is contained in the pages of the Bible whenever you build your home.

He made no mistakes

God makes no mistakes. His nature is such that He is all-powerful and all-knowing. So, He cannot make mistakes. He can only create everything exactly how He desires for it to be created. This means that God made no mistakes whenever He created and designed the home.

Just as God's word is perfect in everything, it is perfect when it reveals the blueprint for the home. Psalm 19:7-9 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." And, James 1:25 refers to God's law as "the perfect law of liberty."

God did not forget to tell us anything about the home that we need to know. Instead, every element of the faith has been once for all delivered to us through the writings of the Scriptures (Jude 1:3). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 simply states, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Similarly, 2 Peter 1:3 says that God's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."

Therefore, everything you need to know about having a home that meets God's approval is found in the pages of God's inspired word. You do not need years of experience to know how you ought to build your home. You do not need to read the advice of so-called "marriage experts" or "child-care specialists." You simply need to search the Scriptures and build according to the blueprint that God has revealed! If you will follow this blueprint to the best of your ability, you will be pleasing to God in your role in the home.

He designed marriage perfectly

God has written the perfect book on marriage. No other book or advice given by men results in having a better marriage than what God has designed and revealed in the pages of Scripture!

God's blueprint for marriage is a very simple one (and we will go into it in greater detail in lesson 3 of this study). His marriage law states that marriage is only a union for a man and a woman. Then, He states that these two are joined together for life. And, the only acceptable cause for divorce is fornication (Matthew 5:31-32). Only then can the one who is innocent of the fornication put away his/her spouse and marry another (who also has the right to marry).

He designed the roles in the home perfectly

Not only has God created the perfect laws to govern marriage, but He has also assigned the perfect roles to help the home function as it should. Remember that God is the one who has complete authority over the home and knows what is best for the home to function according to its design. So, He has the right to assign roles and give authority in the home to whomever He chooses.

His word (which reveals His blueprint for the home) describes the roles He has given to husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, and children. These roles include the husband as head of the home, the wife being in submission to her husband, and children who must obey their parents. Then, God's blueprint teaches parents everything they need to know about raising their children in a way that pleases Him.

Every attempt to change the home fails

Over the years, Satan has tried to attack the home – and for good reason! He recognizes that the home is very important to the success of people who want to serve God. And, it is a crucial element in any civil society. So, if he can destroy the home, he can do a lot to hinder people from serving God.

Therefore, since the beginning of the home, Satan has sought ways to destroy it. He has introduced hatred to the home as early as Genesis 4 when Cain killed Abel. He has introduced polygamy to the home as early as Genesis 4:19 when Lamech took two wives for himself. And, he has introduced homosexuality to the home as early as Genesis 18-19 when God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for practicing such wickedness.

But, these have not been the only changes mankind has tried to make to God’s blueprint. Some have tried making women the heads and providers of the home and men the keepers of the home. Some have allowed their children to have free reign in the home. Some have failed to practice honesty, faithfulness, trust, kindness, etc. Some have failed to love in the way God wants people to love in the home. In fact, Satan has made far too many distortions to God’s blueprint for the home than I can possibly list!

Yet, even though we see homes all around us that are being built according to one of Satan’s many blueprints, we should reject all of these models and recognize that they all fail to reproduce a home that is pleasing to God! In fact, we *must* reject all of these models because they will lead to our spiritual ruin. Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it...”

God has warned us about changing a single word of His perfect blueprint. Revelation 22:18-19 says, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” This warning is just as applicable to

changes made to the blueprint on the home as it is to changes made in any other area!

Mankind must follow the blueprint

The greatest single piece of advice that anyone could ever give to another person on the subject of the home is found in James 4:7. It states, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

There are many ways that Satan will tempt all of the members of the family and try to get them not to follow the Lord and build according to His blueprint. There will be pressure from the families who are around your family. There will be pressure through popular culture. There will be pressure from academia. There will be pressure from the “experts.” There may even be pressure internally.

However, if you simply determine to submit your ideas, desires, and actions entirely to God’s will, He will cause you to be successful in the home! You must determine that God’s way is always the best way and choose to build according to His blueprint. When you do, the benefits will be wide-reaching and fulfilling. But, when you do not, the consequences will be devastating!

Conclusion

God has a blueprint for your home! His blueprint is the only one that is perfect. Every other blueprint fails in some area or in multiple areas. Therefore, you have a choice to make as you consider the kind of home you will build: Will you build according to the perfect blueprint? This series of lessons will be dedicated to evaluating this blueprint and helping you apply it to your life and your home so that you and your home will be pleasing to God!

Study Questions

How is the word “home” being used in this study?

3. God’s Blueprint Is Perfect

Has God made any mistakes in creating and designing the home?

1. God Created The Home

How did God create man?

How has God perfectly designed marriage?

How did God create woman?

How has God perfectly designed the roles in the home?

What did God do to them?

Why does every attempt to change the home fail?

Why does God have authority over the home? Why is God’s authority over the home important?

What is the single greatest piece of advice that can be given on the subject of the home?

2. God Created The Home For A Purpose

Why was the home necessary?

What is the physical purpose for the home?

What is the spiritual purpose for the home?

Lesson 2:

God's Blueprint For Love In The Home

In order to build a home according to God's blueprint, it must be built with love every step of the way. Love must describe every thought, every word, and every action in the home. It is the not-so-secret ingredient for a successful home that pleases God.

Love is absolutely key to everything that is good in the home. Whenever love is in the home, there's joy, peace, unity, service, etc. In fact, every good thing that can happen in the home is a direct result of love. And, in contrast, every evil thing that can happen in the home is a direct result of the absence of love.

Unfortunately, our ideas about love in the home are often distorted by our culture. You see, whenever the world talks about love, it tends to refer to an emotion of fondness and, sometimes, to a feeling of infatuation. And, although both have a place in the home (particularly between husband and wife), these fall far short of God's picture of love for the home! In fact, settling only for these expressions of love that are often portrayed in the movies can leave us with absolutely devastated homes that lack true fulfillment!

As we consider God's blueprint for the home, then, we must recognize that the Architect of the home has a perfect design for love. He tells us who our love must be directed toward in the home so that we are not left guessing and do not miss any of the recipients of the love that ought to be shown in the home. Then, He teaches us the importance of showing love in the home in a way that should help us place fulfilling this great responsibility as a top priority. And, He teaches us exactly what this perfect love ought to look like.

God Commands Love In The Home

God's blueprint for a successful home that is pleasing to Him does not just *involve* love; it *revolves* around love. But, who does His blueprint for the home involve loving? I believe the answer is much more far-reaching than you may initially believe.

Love between husband and wife

It should come as no great surprise to learn that God commands love between husband and wife. Even those who are in the world (generally) recognize the importance of love between husband and wife. For instance, the apostle Paul commanded, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). And, older women are instructed to teach the younger women "to love their husbands" (Titus 2:4).

Now, there is a different Greek word for "love" used in these two verses. We'll explore this in greater detail later in this lesson. However, for now, I just want you to observe that both husband and wife are expected to love each other. And, even though the kind of love that is instructed concerning the wife in Titus 2:4 is a lesser kind of love than is commanded of the husband in Ephesians 5:25, there should be no doubt that husbands and wives are to love one another equally with the greatest kind of love that is possible. In fact, as we will consider in a moment, this kind of love is expected to be shown toward all people (Matthew 22:39).

Then, we should also consider that the greatest way husbands and wives should show their love for one another is concerning their souls. For, there is no greater need that any member of the family has than to go to Heaven. Therefore, above physical security, above financial stability, above meeting physical needs, above meeting emotional needs *must* be meeting the *spiritual* needs of our spouses! We should want to do everything that we can to help them live in a way that will be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven.

Love between parents and children

Love should also be shown in the home between parents and children. In the same verse that tells older women to teach younger women to love their husbands, it also says that younger women are to be taught to “love their children” (Titus 2:4). Proverbs 13:24 says, “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” The implication is that there are actions that parents should take that will show love toward their children.

Although the Scriptures primarily address the love that parents should have for their children, children should also be taught to love their parents and to love one another. For, there is a general responsibility to love all the people we are in contact with, as mentioned previously (Matthew 22:39). Then, an additional passage to consider concerning the love that should be shown between children is 1 John 3:10-12. The passage says that those who do not love their brethren are not true children of God. For, God’s command from the beginning was “that we should love one another” (verse 11), not being like Cain who was wicked and murdered his brother. And, while I realize this passage is talking about love between Christian brethren, the example of Cain concerns physical siblings.

There can be no doubt that God wants parents and children to love one another. But, again, the thing that parents and children should love the most about one another is the souls of the others. Every member of the home should want the absolute best for the spiritual wellbeing of the others. This should be more important than the kind of education our children receive, how many friends our children have, taking

care of one another when we are physically ill, providing each other with physical things, etc.! The greatest desire any member of the family should have for another is that the others will live in a way that will go to Heaven some day!

Love for God

Although love between the members of the home is extremely important in the home, it is not the most crucial element of a successful home that pleases God. Instead, the kind of love that is most important in a home is the love that every member of the home has toward God. In fact, only when every member of the home truly loves God can they show the greatest kind of love toward one another!

Whenever Jesus was asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36), He responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). There is good reason why loving God with everything we are is the greatest of all the commandments in God’s law. Not only is He worthy of such love, but this kind of love will cause all the members of the family to keep God’s commandments and not allow His commandments to be burdensome to them (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

This kind of love for God should be valued, taught, and fostered in the home so that every member of the family will choose to be obedient to the commandments of God! For instance, Moses commanded the Israelites, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Then, Moses instructed them, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Then, it is essential to recognize that we should love God even more than we love the members of our families. For instance, Jesus taught,

The Importance Of Love In The Home

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Now, Jesus is certainly *not* teaching that we should not love our family members. His only point is that we should love Him more than we love everyone else. So, if there is ever a conflict of interests between God and our family members, we must always choose to serve God (compare with Matthew 10:34-39)!

Love for all people

God wants all people to show love for all other people. After stating that the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we are, Jesus said, “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:39). So, the threshold that we are commanded to meet in loving other people is according to how we show love toward ourselves.

In fact, the “Golden Rule” is an appropriate application of this passage. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus commanded, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” All of our conduct toward our families and outside our families should meet this standard. We must consider how we would want people to treat us, talk with us, think about us, etc. – and then treat the people who are around us in the same kinds of ways!

Consider who Jesus’ command to show this kind of love toward includes. Jesus’ instruction was to love your “neighbor” as yourself. A study of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) demonstrates that our neighbors are anyone who is around us who we have the opportunity and ability to show our love toward. This would certainly include the members of our physical families (even our extended families), our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, our physical neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, and our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Once again, in order to love them as we love ourselves, we should love their souls most of all and want to do as much good for them as we possibly can to help them go to Heaven (Galatians 6:10)!

Love ought to characterize every member of the home. And, every member ought to have or develop the kind of love that we have just been describing – toward God, toward other members of the family, and toward all people. But, now we need to consider *why* this love is so important.

It results in fulfilling responsibilities

Have you ever considered *why* Jesus said that the “first and great commandment” is to love God with all of your being and the “second” is to love your neighbor as yourself, in Matthew 22:36-39? Of all God’s commandments, how could these *two* be singled out (whether in the Old Law or in the New)? I believe Jesus answers this question in verse 40. He said, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” That is, keeping every other commandment God has given you hinges on whether you will truly love God and love others as you love yourself!

The apostle Paul indicates the exact same thing in Romans 13:8-10. He said, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

As you consider these two passages, I want you to recognize that love in the home (as we discussed previously) is absolutely essential for every member of the family to fulfill his/her roles and responsibilities. Love is essential for husbands and wives to avoid divorce. Love is essential for husbands to treat their wives how God desires. Love is essential for wives to submit to and respect their husbands. Love is essential for parents to raise their children in the way that is best for them. Love is

essential in order for the members of the home to live faithful Christian lives. Love is essential for the members of the home to do good to others as often as there is opportunity. Without love in the home, there will be a failure to fulfill God-given responsibilities *somewhere!*

It holds families together

People often ask those who have been married for many years and have seemed to be successful in their homes about their “secret.” How could they stay married for so long – to the same person? How could they do so well at raising their children? How could they be so committed to serving God faithfully in the home and have used their homes so well to accomplish God’s purposes for the family?

It should surprise no one when “love” is the answer that is given. In fact, with all due respect to these individuals who have lived as models for us to imitate in the home, they are not the ones who stumbled upon some great secret that no one else can know! The reality is that God has told us that love is the key to this kind of success. Colossians 3:14 says, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

As we put on all of the characteristics that ought to describe us as Christians (as identified in Colossians 3:12-17), it would all be lacking without love! Then, not only does love perfectly bind all of these characteristics together in our lives so that we can please God, but love binds us together with others. Whenever all the members of the family are committed to showing love toward God, toward all the other members of the family, and toward all others, the family will be united and be at peace. They will have the common objective of serving God and serving others. It is only whenever members of the family decide not to live according to the ways of love that problems and difficulties arise in the home, because they will be focused on serving themselves rather than others!

It results in pleasing God

In a few moments, we will be considering the things love does, from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Before we do, I want to consider the first three verses of the

chapter and observe that love is absolutely essential to pleasing God. Although 1 Corinthians 13 specifically teaches us about love between brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, this passage is just as applicable to love in the home.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”

Whenever there were problems in the church at Corinth of such a nature that the members of the church were not treating others how they should, it is interesting that God’s solution was love. And, before God described love to them, He wanted them to recognize that they could not possibly please Him without it! The same thing is true in the home. All of the problems in the home can be traced to a failure to love properly. So, we must recognize that even though we may live to serve God in all other areas of our lives (even giving ourselves as martyrs for Christ), it will all be for nothing if we do not love properly!

The Quality Of Love God Commands In The Home

Up to this point in this lesson, we have been using the word “love” in a very general way. However, we now want to get very specific to better understand the love that God commands in the home. Fortunately, God teaches us exactly what love in the home ought to look like. It is only when we choose to love how God teaches us to love that all the benefits will be experienced.

Different kinds of love

For just a moment, I want you to think about how your culture would define “love.” Today, as I mentioned earlier, it is most commonly believed to

be an emotional fondness. Sometimes the ideas of physical attraction and infatuation are also attached with it. So, it is common for people in society today to talk about “falling in love.” Then, these people who “fall in love” often lose their sense of better judgment and simply act according to their feelings and emotions.

The problem with this as our working definition of “love” can be seen all around us. You see, people who “fall in love” often “fall out of love” whenever their feelings of fondness and affection change toward the one who was loved. It is common for people going through divorce to claim that they have fallen out of love with their spouses whenever they experience difficult times in life or whenever physical attraction fades. And, it is common for married people to “fall in love” with someone else they have no business having intimate relationships with. Even with regard to children and parents, emotions and feelings can change over time. This is why some parents can abuse their children, why some children can harm their parents, and why respect is not always shown between them.

You see, the glue that binds us together will be the glue that holds us together! If that glue is a “love” that is based on feelings and emotions, it will not keep us together during the difficult times. Thankfully, God’s blueprint for the home involves a much more powerful adhesive than this!

For instance, I want you to recognize how the Bible teaches us the need to *learn* to love others. In Titus 2:4 (as we have seen), young women are to be taught by the older women to love their husbands and their children. In Ephesians 5:25, husbands are to learn from Christ as to how they should love their wives. And, 1 Thessalonians 4:9 says, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

So, at least with regard to the way the Bible uses the word “love,” love is not merely an emotion or feeling of fondness that we fall in and out of. Instead, it is something that can be *learned* and we can *train* ourselves to possess! Actually, the Greeks had multiple words for “love.” And, these words reflected different levels of love. One level of love

was an erotic and sexual love (“eros”). One love was a love between parents and children (“storge”). One love was an affectionate regard and friendly type of love (“philia”). And, one love was a selfless and sacrificial type of love (“agape”).

Now, it is *not* my contention that we should not possess all of these kinds of love. For instance, even though the Greek New Testament does not use the word “eros” (romantic and sexual love), it *should* be present within a marriage. For instance, the Song of Solomon demonstrates how husbands and wives *should* possess a level of physical attraction, and the New Testament teaches that sexual desires must be fulfilled in the marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Yet, feelings of attraction can be fleeting and unreliable – and must not be the bedrock of love in the home!

Then, while there must be “philia” love (warm and friendly affection) in the home (as a form of this word is used in Titus 2:4), I want to focus on the fact that the highest form of all love is commanded within the home. It is directly used of the husband’s responsibility to love his wife in Ephesians 5:25. And, it is the kind of love that is involved in the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36-40).

This “agape” love is a self-giving, selfless, and sacrificial kind of love that *always* seeks what is in the best interest of the one being shown love. And, it is *not* dependent in any way on being shown love in return! This is how God can expect us to love our enemies even while they are trying to harm us (Matthew 5:43-48). This kind of love, though, is much greater than any emotion or feeling. Instead, this kind of love is a *choice*! And, we should never settle for a lesser form of love. For, this love is the only kind of love that will accomplish all that we have been studying about through this lesson! In fact, I would suggest that the lesser forms of love will only be enjoyed to their greatest possible extent when we show this greater form of love!

God is the perfect example of love

God is the perfect Teacher of how to love. Recall that 1 Thessalonians 4:9 says that the Thessalonian Christians were “taught by God to love

one another.” Once again, Ephesians 5:25 instructs husbands to love their wives “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” The reason why God is the perfect Teacher on how to show this kind of agape love is because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Quite literally, God is “*agape*”! So, if you want to learn what “agape” love looks like, it looks exactly like God!

Romans 5:5 helps us to understand how we can learn love from God. It says, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” The Holy Spirit has poured out God’s love in the pages of the Bible. Throughout the Scriptures, the Bible helps us to learn about God’s amazing love. Namely, it teaches us about God’s sacrificial and selfless love that was shown for us whenever God sent Jesus Christ to die for us. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)! John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

So, God’s love was not based on an emotional whim that hit Him so that He “fell in love” with sinners one day. Instead, God’s love was completely selfless and sacrificial and acted in the best interest of those He loved. This love was so great that Jesus Christ left Heaven, came to earth, suffered at the hands of sinners, and was put to a horrible death on the cross. But, this love was not for selfish reasons. Instead, it was all because we needed to be saved from the consequences of our sins! And, this love was demonstrated even toward the “unlovable.” Remember that God demonstrated His love toward us, while we were still sinners!

God’s definition of love

Now, God expects us to love Him and others in the same way He has shown us His love. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” So, every one we are commanded to love (as discussed

earlier in this lesson) must receive this kind of love from us.

Fortunately, God has taught us even more about the characteristics of this kind of love. Returning to 1 Corinthians 13, God teaches us what this love does in verses 4 through 7. “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Now, let’s take up a consideration of the actions of “*agape*” love, recognizing that this is the love God has shown toward us and that He commands us to show toward others (including the members of the home). And, we should remember that this is how love must act, regardless of whether this kind of love is returned to us! Then, remember that 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 taught that without this kind of love being shown toward everyone, our service for God is useless!

(1) Love suffers long. True love has this quality that is patiently willing to suffer through the wrongs that other people may do against us. Rather than getting upset and becoming quickly angered by the things that other people do to us or have failed to do, we should put our anger and frustration on hold in order to act in their best interests. After all, this is exactly how God is longsuffering with us whenever we sin against Him (2 Peter 3:9).

(2) Love is kind. True love has this quality of being generous, charitable, considerate, and helpful to others. This quality ought to be reflected in our thoughts, thinking how we can do and say kind things to others. It ought to be reflected in our words, speaking only words that are seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6). And, it ought to be reflected in our conduct, doing only the things that will be helpful toward them.

(3) Love does not envy. True love stays away from this quality of rivalry that is not only jealous of what another has, but that also seeks to deprive the other of it. No member of the family should ever be in competition with another in a way that will foster hard feelings, angry words, etc. Recognize that all

the members of the home are supposed to be “on the same team” and working together to accomplish the purposes of God, not trying to work against each other (or anyone else).

(4) Love does not parade itself and is not puffed up. True love stays away from being big-headed, bragging about self, and arrogance. Rather than being big-headed, love is big-hearted. Love is humble and wants to serve others ahead of serving our own desires (Philippians 2:3-4). It does not raise ourselves above others. And, in connection with humility, we should be able to acknowledge the mistakes and failures that we make in order to say “I’m sorry” and make the necessary corrections.

(5) Love does not behave rudely. True love does not act or talk in a manner that is “unbecoming” of who a Christian ought to be. Instead, love acts properly. And, this is *not* just true when things are going well and it is easy to act in a self-controlled and courteous kind of way. Rather, this even applies to the moments of disagreement that will be experienced and whenever someone wants to accuse and argue with us! We might simply say that true love never argues, yells in a mean-spirited kind of way, belittles, or insults others.

(6) Love does not seek its own. True love is not selfish. It does not put your own interest and desires above the interests, desires, and wellbeing of others. It does not make other people serve us. Instead, it seeks to serve others. It doesn’t “look out for ‘number one’” – unless, of course, “number one” is God, “number two” is your spouse, and “number three” is everyone else! Love simply does not make everyone and everything else revolve around us. Rather, we will want to be looking for every opportunity to give of ourselves.

(7) Love is not provoked. True love is not easily drawn to anger. Love keeps a cool head. Rather than giving into a burst of emotion that lashes out in an angry and unbecoming kind of way, love causes us to control our emotions. Love cannot be irritable or “unhinged.” Love cannot be too touchy and easily set off. We should never make other people feel as if they have to “walk on eggshells” whenever they are around us in fear that we will be

easily provoked to an emotional response of anger (or some other emotion).

(8) Love thinks no evil. True love does not keep a record of wrongs that have been committed against us. This is particularly true whenever sin has been committed and corrected. Forgiveness must be extended in order to receive the forgiveness of God (see Matthew 6:14-15). So, love does not harbor and store up all the wrongs that have been committed against us in the past so that we can use them to our advantage later. And, love does not live in the past so as to seek revenge, to continually rehash old issues, to relive past mistakes, and to hold grudges.

(9) Love does not rejoice in iniquity. True love is not happy whenever someone sins against God. True love recognizes that sin is never helpful. It never accomplishes anything that is good. It always messes things up. Ultimately, it results in the spiritual destruction and punishment of sinners in Hellfire. So, we should never be pleased to hear about anyone choosing to do things that are contrary to God’s ways.

(10) Love rejoices in truth. True love wants everyone to live according to the ways of truth. This is love’s greatest ambition. So, we should be glad whenever the people in our lives choose to believe and obey the truth that God has revealed in the pages of the Bible. And, we should be glad whenever they are committed to only speaking words of truth to us. Furthermore, we should always be working to foster an environment around us where people know that we do rejoice in truth rather than in evil.

(11) Love bears all things. True love bears with and protects others. Certainly, we all deal with people who do not always do the things they ought to do, say the things they ought to say, and think the things they ought to think. Sometimes things are done that should not be done. Sometimes things are not done that should be done. Yet, love is committed to doing what is in the best interest of that person. Love does not gossip and tell others about all the flaws of another (though there is a time to publicly rebuke someone for unrepented sin, see Matthew 18:15-17). Love will do all it can to help someone in sin correct the sin, rather than just walk away from him/her.

(12) Love believes all things. True love always seeks to trust others. It is not cynical or quick to find fault in others for no reason at all. Love causes us to believe the best possible thing about others. It causes us to assign the best possible motives on the actions of others rather than quickly assuming the worst. Although love is not blind and unwilling to accept the truth, it is unwilling to accept anything less than the best explanation until there is solid proof that is given to think otherwise. Love gives the “benefit of the doubt” at all times.

(13) Love hopes all things. True love always hopes that things will get better. There will certainly be things in the home that happen which we wish were not true. There will be things that we wish would change. And, even when those we love commit sin, love holds out hope for them rather than losing all confidence and running away. So, love recognizes that as long as our loved ones have life and the ability to reason, things can get better!

(14) Love endures all things. True love does not give up. No matter what kinds of evils Satan may try to throw at the members of the home, true love causes them all to be victorious because they will never cut and run! True love is not just willing to fulfill all of the responsibilities of love whenever things are going well. Instead, it will fulfill all of these same responsibilities even when there are times of great difficulty!

Conclusion

Love is crucial to the success and wellbeing of any home! Show me a home that practices this kind of true love, and I will show you a home that pleases the Lord, that overcomes obstacles and difficulties, that is selfless, and where the members always seek the best interests of the others. But, show me a home that does not practice this kind of true love, and I will show you a home that has serious problems and that can be easily broken apart. Finally, after teaching us how to practice true love, 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, “Love never fails.” Everything else that tries to hold a family together will eventually fail. But, love will never fail!

Study Questions

What does it mean to “love”?

1. God Commands Love In The Home

Where does God command love between husband and wife?

Where does God command love between parents and children?

Where does God command love for God?

Where does God command love for all people?

2. The Importance Of Love In The Home

How does love result in fulfilling responsibilities?

How does love hold families together?

How does love result in pleasing God?

3. The Quality Of Love God Commands In The Home

How many kinds of “love” did the Greeks recognize?
What is the highest form of love?

(10) Love rejoices in truth –

Who is the perfect example of love? What can you learn from His love?

(11) Love bears all things –

Briefly discuss the following actions of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, based on the *New King James Version*).

(12) Love believes all things –

(1) Love suffers long –

(13) Love believes all things –

(2) Love is kind –

(14) Love endures all things –

(3) Love does not envy –

(4) Love does not parade itself and is not puffed up –

(5) Love does not behave rudely –

(6) Love does not seek its own –

(7) Love is not provoked –

(8) Love thinks no evil –

(9) Love does not rejoice in iniquity –

Lesson 3:

God's Blueprint For Marriage

Marriage is the very closest of all earthly relationships. And, having marriages that are built according to God's blueprint are crucial to the success of any home. Unfortunately, Satan is at work in this world trying to destroy marriages – and is having great success!

Satan is not only trying to destroy marriages by means of divorce, but he is also at work to ruin this relationship by making it as miserable as possible for everyone who is involved. He does not want husbands and wives to fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the home. He wants marriages to be about self and wants to keep husbands and wives from functioning as one unit.

Thankfully, God has revealed His perfect blueprint for marriage! Not only has God revealed specific responsibilities for husbands and wives (as we'll discuss in lessons four and five), but He has also helped us to understand some fundamentals about the marital relationship. These fundamentals are absolutely crucial to the success of any marriage and home.

As we consider the blueprint for the home God has given us, we must consider the marriage covenant and the seriousness of entering this covenant with another. Although Satan tries to get us to believe differently, marriage is *not* something that can rightfully be ended if things “don't work out.”

Instead, God has designed a permanence about marriage. Then, He has assigned mutual responsibilities for husbands and wives of both a physical and spiritual nature.

The Permanence Of Marriage

It is common for marriages today to end in divorce. It is often said that nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. Now, I suppose that number could be higher or it could be lower. Regardless, it is plainly observable that many people today do not respect the marriage covenant. Instead, they commonly believe that if their marriages do not turn out the way they had hoped, they can just divorce or separate and possibly even marry another. However, we need to consider God's blueprint to understand what God intends for the duration of the marriage covenant.

The marriage covenant

We have previously studied the fact that God is the Creator and Designer of marriage. And, as He has designed marriage, He has told us that marriage is a kind of covenant (agreement) that is the closest of all earthly covenants we can make. For instance, consider Malachi 2:14-16.

“Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. ‘For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence,’ Says the Lord of hosts. ‘Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously.’”

Marriage is a covenant agreement between two people. According to God's blueprint, this agreement must *only* be between one man and one woman. These two individuals make an agreement with one another (in connection with the marriage

laws where they are being married) to be joined together in this closest of all earthly relationships. So, they are making a very serious promise to one another to live as husband and wife. In our society, marriage ceremonies involve the exchanging of vows (i.e. to love, honor, and cherish one another for life through sickness, health, prosperity, poverty, etc. for as long as they both live).

Now, if this was all that we knew about the marriage covenant, this *should* be enough. For, we know that God does not approve of breaking vows that are made (see Ecclesiastes 5:4). God does not approve of those who lie (see Revelation 21:8). And, this is precisely what someone does whenever he/she does not fulfill the marriage covenant!

But, to make the marriage covenant even more serious, we must recognize that all Scriptural marriages (i.e. marriages that have God's approval) also involve God as a central part of their union. For, it is God who binds people together in Scriptural marriages. For instance, Proverbs 2:16-17 issues a warning about the immoral woman who tries to seduce one who is not her husband. She is said to forsake "the companion of her youth" and forget "the covenant of her God."

Jesus also taught us that God is directly involved in all Scriptural marriages. He said that "they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Even though a husband, wife, or both may decide to break their covenant with one another, they cannot break the bond with which God has joined them (as we will see later)!

So, we must recognize that marriage is very serious business. It is not a "let's try it out and see if it works" kind of relationship. It is the most solemn of all earthly relationships and involves a covenant agreement between spouses and God! Therefore, we should take a moment to warn anyone who is contemplating marriage (either now or in the future) to not take marriage lightly!

Those who consider entering the marriage covenant with another must exercise great care in selecting a spouse. Make sure that the one you are preparing to marry is the one you want to spend your *entire* life with. Most importantly, make sure that you

know the individual well enough that you have confidence that individual will help you serve God faithfully throughout your life and fulfill his/her God-given responsibilities.

Bound for life

The fact that marriage is a covenant tells us a great deal about the permanence of marriage. For, covenants are very serious and God does not approve of covenant-breaking. But, we can learn even more about the permanence of marriage in the Scriptures.

Let's focus again on the fact that God binds two people together in marriages that have His approval. Consider Romans 7:2-3. "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man."

As we saw from Matthew 19:6, God is the one who binds these two together. Now, this verse helps us to see that they are bound together "by the law." This is *not* the marriage law of whatever country or state you live in. Instead, it is also called "the law of her husband." So, this is God's marriage law.

Notice, then, how long this bond lasts. The passage says that "the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives." It is only when "the husband dies" that "she is released from the law of her husband." So, this marriage bond lasts for as long as both husband and wife are alive – no more and no less.

It is worth noting at this point that marriage *does* end at death. Jesus said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). Thus, the marriage bond is broken whenever one spouse dies, permitting the surviving spouse the right to remarry.

Now, consider the result when an individual ignores this bond and decides to marry another. Romans 7:3 makes it clear that if "while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an

adulteress.” She will be guilty of adultery because she is still bound to the husband who is still alive. So, even though she may have obtained a divorce according to man’s marriage laws and remarried, she was still bound to her original husband!

Jesus’ teaching on the duration of marriage also makes it plain to see that it lasts for life. For instance, whenever Jesus was asked about whether it was lawful to divorce, Mark 10:11-12 says, “So He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’” And, He taught in Luke 16:18, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

One exception for divorce

God’s marriage law clearly teaches that marriage is permanent. It lasts for as long as both individuals live on this earth. You should notice that, up to this point, we have not even been given an exception to this rule. However, as we search the Scriptures, it is clear that God gives *one* acceptable cause for divorce.

Matthew 19:1-12 demonstrates the truth about this point. Jesus was asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason” (verse 3)? Now, please recognize that the question is about divorce. And, Jesus will directly answer this question. Certainly, there are many people today who *have* divorced for many different reasons. But, we should only be interested in what God’s marriage law teaches.

To begin answering this question, Jesus went back to the beginning (in Genesis 2). He said, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (verses 4-6).

Appreciate the fact that, so far, Jesus has indicated that divorce for just any reason is *not*

permitted. Instead, Jesus has said that marriage is between a man and a woman, they are joined together by God, and made one flesh. Then, I really want you to focus on the statement that “what God has joined together, let not man separate.” No one (not a husband, not a wife, or anyone else) is permitted to separate what God has joined together. So, to divorce for just any cause would be to violate what God has just commanded not to be done! Thus, it would be a sin!

The people, then, asked Jesus, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away” (verse 7)? Jesus answered, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (verse 8). So, even though it was permitted for a time, divorce for just any cause was not part of God’s blueprint! And, Jesus is showing us what this blueprint looks like!

Therefore, Jesus has answered the question about divorce for just any cause by teaching it is *not* acceptable to God! Then, He gives *one* exception in verse 9. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” The *only* acceptable cause for divorce is whenever fornication is involved. Then, only the one who is innocent of the fornication is permitted to divorce his/her spouse (who is guilty of the fornication) and get remarried (to one who also has the right to marry).

Clearly, God’s marriage law was understood as being very strict because Jesus’ disciples responded by saying that it is better not to marry (verse 10). But, Jesus told them that not everyone would be able to remain unmarried throughout their lives (verses 11-12). Instead, those who would decide to marry would be required to live according to God’s marriage law of only permitting divorce if fornication is involved.

Jesus taught the same thing earlier, in Matthew 5:31-32. “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and

whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Once again, we can plainly see that Jesus is teaching that divorce for just any cause is not permissible to God. Jesus’ law was different than what had been accepted concerning divorce. If divorce happens for any reason other than fornication, the one who has divorced will even be held responsible for causing the other to commit adultery if this occurs!

But, some will question whether 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 provides another option. It says, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”

Does this text provide an option to divorce for other causes and then remain unmarried? First, consider that this passage forbids divorce – twice. God’s *commandment* is for the wife not to depart from her husband and the husband is not to divorce his wife. Now, why would God command husbands and wives not to divorce and then permit the thing to happen? I believe the issue about remaining unmarried or being reconciled is merely the options for those who go ahead and divorce contrary to God’s commandment.

The divorce is sinful. But, in a situation that involves two people, reconciliation may not always be possible. God wants the two to be reconciled. And, reconciliation would be necessary for repentance. However, it may be that one of the people involved will not agree to be reconciled. In this case, the one who is seeking reconciliation must remain unmarried until the opportunity to be reconciled comes.

Second, remember that whatever is taught by 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 cannot contradict Jesus’ teachings and what Paul taught in Romans 7:2-3. Therefore, we must conclude that it gives no other permission to divorce than has already been discussed. Man still is not permitted to separate what God has joined together!

Then, a final point to consider about divorce for just any cause is this: Whenever divorce occurs, there is a failure to love *somewhere*. Love is commanded of everyone in the home. And, remember (from lesson 2) that love involves acting in the best interest of the others. But, whenever a spouse divorces the other for a cause other than fornication, such a one is surely not showing love! Furthermore, spouses who divorce for unscriptural causes are not showing love toward their children (who also must deal with the consequences of a divorce in the home). Then, recall that your faith is worthless if you do not show love (go back and read 1 Corinthians 13).

Now, all of this has been very critical to understand because it is inevitable that problems and difficulties will arise in a marriage. But, whenever these problems and difficulties arise in a marriage, it is essential to recognize that divorce is an option that *must not* be on the table! Instead, husbands and wives must be committed to one another and to God and strive diligently to work out their difficulties in a way that pleases God! And, regardless of how bad a marriage is, it is never made better by compounding sin upon sin by divorcing for an unscriptural reason!

Mutual Physical Responsibilities In Marriage

God’s marriage law is very strict and very serious. But, this ought to be expected – because marriage is a very serious relationship. And, part of this relationship involves mutual responsibilities that each spouse has toward the other. Some of these are physical responsibilities and some of these are spiritual responsibilities. For now, let’s focus on the physical responsibilities.

Love

As was outlined in lesson two, love is an essential part of a home that pleases God. And, God has given all members of the family the responsibility to love one another. This includes husbands loving their wives as Christ has loved the

church (Ephesians 5:25) and wives loving their husbands (Titus 2:4).

Then, the nature of this love must be according to God's instructions in 1 Corinthians 13. Without this kind of selfless and sacrificial love, God is not pleased with any marriage. And, those who do not love their spouses in the way that is described in that chapter are in great danger of losing their souls! Therefore, you should consistently review "the love chapter" of the Bible and apply it to your marriage.

Live as one flesh

We have previously seen that the marriage relationship is the closest of all earthly relationships. It is so close that husband and wife are identified as being "one flesh." God's blueprint for marriage includes that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Therefore, Jesus said that they are "no longer two but one flesh" and "what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

So, husband and wife are not to be living separate lives from one another. Instead, they are to be so involved in one another's lives that it is like only having one person. Unfortunately, there are many husbands and wives who have tried to separate themselves from their spouses. Sometimes this happens whenever a husband and wife decide that they will no longer live together and sleep together. Although they are technically still married, they are operating as two.

Sometimes, people will look to 1 Corinthians 7:5 as permission for partners in a troubled marriage to separate for a time. It says, "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." Some believe that this passage permits a physical separation (though not a divorce). However, I believe we should examine the matter more closely.

First, understand the context of this passage. This passage is *not* addressing a troubled marriage. Instead, it is addressing the sexual relationship. The entire context (read verses 1-5) deals with the

important element of sexual fulfillment as part of this one-flesh relationship. Paul is teaching that husbands and wives must show the proper affection in sexual ways for their spouses. Therefore, a husband and wife must not deprive the other of this sexual fulfillment. The *only* time this can be done is when there is agreement for a time in order to engage in prayer and fasting.

So, this passage is talking about sexual separation for an agreed upon time in order to be devoted to God in prayer and fasting – not a physical separation because spouses cannot get along and work out their problems! In fact, to separate from one another in that way would be a failure of the one flesh relationship.

God intends for husbands and wives to function as one. They share in everything about life (i.e. successes, failures, concerns, needs, desires, goals, money, etc.). There should be such a close and open relationship between the two that there is nothing that is withheld from the other.

Leave father and mother

Once again, God has said that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). We have already focused on the part of this text that says husbands and wives are to be joined to one another as one flesh. Now, let's consider the *leaving* element of this passage.

Let's begin by recognizing that you are "one flesh" with no one else but your spouse. You are not "one flesh" with your children, with your parents, with your siblings, with your brothers and sisters in Christ, with your friends, with your co-workers, or with any others. This is a special relationship that is *only* to be shared with your spouse in a God-approved marriage. In fact, 1 Corinthians 6:16 helps us understand that we must not become one flesh with any other!

Now, let's focus on what this means for the relationships that we have with our parents. Whenever we are married, we leave our parents' homes and form our own homes. Although we still love our parents and have responsibilities toward them (as we'll discuss in another lesson), our

responsibilities toward our spouses take priority. So, we now work as one person with our spouses. And, we must not allow our relationships with our parents to interfere with our relationships with our husbands or wives.

Then, to take this principle to another level, this same thing is true about any lesser relationship. Whenever we become one flesh with our spouses, we must not allow our relationships with *anyone* else to interfere. This includes our children, our friends, our co-workers, etc. Our foremost commitment (as far as any physical relationship is concerned) is to the one person we share this one flesh relationship with!

Faithfulness

God demands faithfulness to our spouses. We must be true to them in every area. Certainly, this is true with regard to the sexual relationship. Again, you are only “one flesh” with your husband or wife and must never try to join yourself together with another. If you do, you commit the sin of adultery, which will result in eternal punishment in Hell (Galatians 5:19-21).

You should remember the passages that we studied concerning God’s marriage law. Only fornication gives God-approved cause to divorce. Therefore, God insists that the only place our sexual desires can be rightly fulfilled is within a God-approved marriage. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Husbands and wives have the responsibility to be committed to one another in this area. As we have considered in a previous lesson, 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 helps us to recognize this responsibility. Paul teaches that the husband has authority over his wife’s body and the wife has authority over her husband’s body. Neither one has any authority to withhold themselves from the other. And, each one should strive to give the needed affection to one another in this regard. Yes, husbands and wives should desire to fulfill this responsibility to the best of their abilities.

Then, regardless of whether your sexual needs are being met in the marriage, you have the responsibility to be completely faithful to your

spouse. Jesus helps us to think about faithfulness as being more than just abstaining from sexual intercourse with another. In Matthew 5:27-28, He says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” So, if you even so much as look at another person with lust in your heart, you are not faithful to your spouse! Although lusting for another is *not* a God-approved cause for divorce, it does challenge us to make sure that our faithfulness is not just a physical appearance of faithfulness, but a complete devotion to one another.

Fulfill God-given roles

Beginning with the next lesson, we will focus on the specific roles God has given to husbands and wives. As the Architect of the home, God has assigned roles that will make the home function at its very best. Although we will study the specific roles later, we should recognize a very key point about these roles: They are not dependent upon how well your spouse fulfills his/her role!

That is, God has given *you* certain responsibilities as a husband or wife. And, even if you are married to the most wicked person to ever walk on the face of this earth who never even tries to fulfill the role God has given him/her in the home, you still have the responsibility to do your part. Although it is not always easy to fulfill your God-given role in the home, you must recognize that your service is (ultimately) to the Lord and not to any person.

In the context of slaves fulfilling their roles to their evil masters, Paul said, “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Colossians 3:22-25). This is an excellent principle that is applicable to this point about fulfilling roles in marriage!

Mutual Spiritual Responsibilities In Marriage

Before closing this lesson, I believe that it is important to consider some quick points regarding our mutual spiritual responsibilities in marriage. After all, if you are a Christian, the one thing you should love the most about your spouse is his/her soul! You should want your spouse to go to Heaven more than you want anything else for him/her. Therefore, there are some things you should be doing to demonstrate such a love for him/her.

Teach

It is the role of the husband/father to be the spiritual leader of the home. For instance, he is instructed to bring up his children in the “training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Women are instructed not to “teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12). And, whenever Paul commanded that Christian women were not to speak in the assemblies of the church, he said that if they wanted to learn something, “let them ask their own husbands at home” (1 Corinthians 14:35-35). Certainly, a Christian man should want to learn as much as he can about God’s word so that he can teach his wife and his children about the ways of God!

But, the husband and father is not always a Christian. In this situation, a wife can and should have a tremendous influence on her husband to teach him the gospel of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:1-2 demonstrates that this is true even when a husband considers the godly example of his wife. Sometimes, he can be won to Jesus Christ “without a word” through the example of his wife. Certainly, Christian women should want to do everything that they can to win their husbands to the Lord and teach them the gospel of Christ!

Encourage

Satan tries to discourage everyone who is a Christian. But, one of the great benefits of being in a marriage in which both husband and wife are committed to serving the Lord is found in that each

one should be working to encourage the other every single day! This is the fulfillment of Hebrews 3:12-13.

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” So, every single day, husbands and wives can find some way to encourage each other to overcome their temptations, to endure their struggles, to do the good works God desires them to do, and to press toward the goal of everlasting life in Heaven! They can do this by offering the encouragement of God’s word to each other and helping to apply His word to their lives!

Bear burdens

Everyone who is a Christian (as well as those who are not) face burdens in this life. Sometimes they are the burdens of health struggles. Sometimes they are the burdens of dealing with the passing of loved ones. Sometimes they are burdens involving family struggles. Sometimes they are burdens at work. Sometimes they are burdens that are connected with living for the Lord.

Regardless, just as every Christian must bear “one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), husbands and wives must find ways to do this for one another. They should weep with their spouses who are weeping (and rejoice with their spouses who are rejoicing, Romans 12:15). And, husbands and wives should do whatever they can to serve one another in order to help lift each other’s burdens (see John 13:1-17).

Correct

All Christians will fall short of living by God’s word at some time in their lives. Although many of their brothers and sisters in Christ will not know about these failures and the one who has sinned may not feel comfortable enough with his/her brethren to share the sin with them, a marriage relationship should provide an excellent environment for correcting sin! After all, your Christian spouse should be more interested in your spiritual wellbeing than any other!

For instance, Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” So, you should help your spouse who has sinned come back to the Lord. Perhaps you need to identify the sin that has been committed to him/her. And, there are even times when a husband or wife should carry out the steps of discipline regarding a Christian spouse who will not repent (see Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). But, this is all done in love and with a spirit of gentleness.

Pray

Every Christian should recognize the great power of prayer and utilize it as a tool to petition God on behalf of others. Perhaps for someone who is sick. Perhaps for someone who is struggling spiritually. Perhaps for someone who faces a challenge or obstacle in life. Yet, this is not just true with regard to others, but husbands and wives ought to be praying for one another regularly.

James 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Certainly, there are many ways you can and should be praying for your spouse. Pray for him/her frequently and fervently. Then, do not forget to give God thanks for him/her!

Conclusion

Marriage is a wonderful blessing from God. But, it will only seem to be a true blessing *if* we build according to the blueprint that God has given us concerning marriage. Sadly, there are many marriages that have ended in divorce or that are sources of great suffering – because those involved in the marriages did *not* build according to God’s blueprint. So, regardless of your situation, you *must* determine to build according to God’s perfect pattern. Even if your marriage has failed or is very shaky, determine that you will do your part to make the corrections that need to be made, repent of the sin that has been committed, and build according to

God’s solid pattern in your home in the future! Through Christ, you can have a marriage that is pleasing to God and that thrives!

Study Questions

How is Satan trying to destroy marriages?

1. The Permanence Of Marriage

How is marriage a “covenant”?

Explain how God binds two people together. How long does this bond last?

Does God approve of divorce for just any cause?

2. Mutual Physical Responsibilities In Marriage

What is the responsibility for husband and wife to love each other?

What is the responsibility for husband and wife to live as one flesh?

What is the responsibility for husband and wife to leave father and mother?

What is the responsibility for husband and wife to be faithful to one another?

What is the responsibility for husband and wife to fulfill their God-given roles?

3. Mutual Spiritual Responsibilities In Marriage

What is the responsibility for the husband and wife to teach one another?

What is the responsibility for the husband and wife to encourage one another?

What is the responsibility for the husband and wife to bear each other's burdens?

What is the responsibility for the husband and wife to correct one another?

What is the responsibility for the husband and wife to pray for one another?

Lesson 4: God's Blueprint For The Husband And Father

God has given each member of the home a specific role to fulfill. As the Architect of the home, He is the one who knows how the home will be the most successful. So, if we are interested in building according to God's blueprint, we must observe these roles and fulfill them to the very best of our abilities.

Although every member of the family is equal in importance and value, they do not all have equal roles. But, rather than despising the roles God has assigned, these roles ought to be embraced. Each member of the home ought to learn how he/she can fulfill these roles in such a way that will result in God-approved homes.

The husband and father is one important piece in the home. And, God has given him the distinction of being the head of the home. Certainly, this involves great responsibility, as much of his family's success will depend on how he fulfills his role. It is, indeed, very sad and devastating to a family whenever husbands and fathers do not listen to God concerning their role in the home.

As we consider God's blueprint for the home, we must consider His blueprint for the role of the husband and father. Although Satan is working to diminish this role and reorganize the home, we must recognize that God's plan is always the best one. So, we must consider the man as the head of the home. And, in doing so, this means that we must consider

the husband as head of his wife and as head of his children.

The Man Is The Head Of The Home

Many homes have quickly gone astray from God's blueprint by simply never understanding God's blueprint regarding the roles in the home. You see, God has not just given us the roles and left it up to us to assign who gets to fill them. Instead, He has given us both the roles *and* assigned who must fill them. So, even though the man's headship of the home is often challenged, it must be embraced and understood according to God's pattern. For, there have also been many men who have abused their role in the home. Therefore, let's consider the role of headship God has given to men in the home.

God has given man this position

As the ultimate Head of the home, God also assigned roles to each member of the home. So, as we consider these roles, we must remember that their origin is the eternal and all-wise God who never changes! Therefore, God always knows what is best for those people He has created – including in the home.

Now, as we consider these roles, let's recognize that these roles *do not* indicate that anyone is unequal in value. All people in every home have the same value physically and spiritually! They just *do not* have the same roles and standing in the home. But, please remember that God is the only one who has the authority to assign roles in the home – because He is the one who has created it!

Regarding the husband, God has assigned him to be the head of the home. Listen to Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." Please consider two things from this verse. First, the headship of the husband in the home is compared to the headship of Christ over the church (see Colossians 1:18). So, just as there can be no doubt that Christ is Head of His church, there can be

no doubt that God has assigned the husband to be the head of the home. Second, the headship of the husband over the home is *not* a matter of cultural preference. Just as Christ continues to be the Head of the church, husbands continue to be the only proper and God-assigned heads of their homes. And, this headship lasts for exactly as long as he has a home to be head over. Shifting opinions in culture do not change God's arrangement in the home!

Also consider 1 Corinthians 11:3. "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." Now, there are two important lessons to see from this verse. First, this is another passage that proves God has assigned husbands as having the role of being head over their wives. There is a God-given structure that is identified in this verse, and this structure never changes. Second, this passage provides evidence that the husband's headship does *not* make him more valuable than his wife. For instance, God (the Father) is Head over Jesus. But, this does not make Jesus any less God than the Father is. The same thing is true regarding men and women.

Now, what does the man's headship of the home *mean*? Ephesians 5:24 makes it abundantly clear that a wife has the responsibility to submit to her husband "in everything." And, Ephesians 6:1 commands children to "obey" their parents. The only area in which wives and children are permitted not to submit and obey the head of the home is whenever following his lead goes against the will of God. We must always obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)!

Although this provides just a very brief overview of the God-given structure of the home, demonstrating that the husband is assigned by God to be the head of the home, I do want to spend a moment considering *why* this is the case. Now, please recognize that God does *not* have to explain His reasoning. But, I do believe that He helps us to understand His reasoning in 1 Timothy 2:11-14. "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."

Now, I recognize that this passage is not directly talking about the home. But, I believe the two reasons given are fitting to explain why God has assigned the husband as head of the home. First, God created the man before the woman. As Genesis 2 teaches, the woman was created to be a helper suitable for the man. Second, the woman was the first to commit sin. Only after Eve committed sin do we read of God telling her, "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). These two reasons do not change with the culture!

Now, before we consider the man's role in greater detail, I want to stress that this role belongs to the man in the home. It is his responsibility to fulfill this role to the best of his ability. He cannot delegate his headship to any other. And, he is the head of the home regardless of how his wife or children feel about that role. Regardless of how any other member of the home treats him or fulfills their roles, he has the responsibility to lead his family.

This is a position of leadership

To be the "head" of the home is to be the *leader* of the home. What God wants is real men who will step up in the home and lead as Christ leads His church. You see, there is much that rises or falls based on leadership (i.e. nations, businesses, churches). The home is no different. The leadership that a man provides in the home is crucial in determining whether the home and every member of the home will be pleasing to God or not.

So, God does not just want those who are part of the male sex to call themselves the head of the home. Instead, he wants real men who will rise to His calling to lead the home in the ways He has designed. Consider Jeremiah 5:1. Jeremiah was told, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See now and know; And seek in her open places If you can find a man, If there is anyone who executes judgment, Who seeks the truth, And I will pardon her."

Now, I do not think that Jeremiah would have had difficulty finding individuals who were male in Jerusalem. But, he would have difficulty finding real men who measured up to God's standard of executing judgment and seeking truth! The same thing is true in the home today. Unfortunately, there

are many men who have accepted the title or distinction as being the head of the home without actually leading the home. Or, there have been many men who have chosen to lead their homes “with an iron fist” as a dictator. However, we should learn what God’s model for leadership involves.

As I have already mentioned, the model for men in the home is Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:22-33, the relationship between the husband and wife is compared to the relationship between Christ and His church. So, while the wife should learn from the church, the husband is expected to learn from Christ. Consider, then, a few essential points about Christ’s leadership.

His leadership model is that of a loving Shepherd. In John 10:1-30, Jesus claimed to be “the good shepherd” who “gives His life for the sheep” (verse 11). He is not like a hireling who does not own the sheep and flees whenever there is trouble so that the sheep are harmed and scattered. Instead, He intimately knows His sheep and He is known by His sheep. And, because His sheep see His loving care, they trust Him and are willing to follow His leadership.

This is the leadership model that husbands and fathers must emulate in the home. They must have such a sacrificial love for every member of the family that they would lay down their lives for each one. And, their families will develop respect and trust for them whenever they see the sacrificial love that is shown. The members of the family should never have any question that the decisions that are made by the head are *always* in their best interest. Therefore, they should have the utmost confidence that the direction he is leading them is safe and profitable. And, the husband and father who follows Christ’s example of loving the church enough to sacrifice Himself for her will be focused on his family’s best interests more than his own desires!

Next, Christ’s leadership provides the perfect example. Christ’s leadership was not a “do as I say, not as I do” model. Instead, Jesus condemned such hypocrisy whenever He saw it. For instance, Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of some religious leaders in Matthew 23 when He said, “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do

not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (verses 3-4). In contrast, Jesus lived on this earth and provided the perfect example of how to live to please God, being tempted in all the same ways we are tempted in (see Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, He has shown us the way and we only need to “follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Husbands and fathers must lead their homes in this same way. Rather than just commanding, they must lead by example. They should be like an illuminated city on a hill and a candle set on a candlestick for their family to see and follow through this dark world (Matthew 5:13-16). They should be walking in Christ’s footsteps and leading their families to do the same. Unfortunately, there are many husbands and fathers who do not provide this kind of leadership in the home. Instead, their wives and children recognize them as being hypocrites, unwilling to do the very things that are expected of them.

Finally, Christ’s leadership centered around service. Christ is not a dictator who has only ever expected people to serve Him. While Christ certainly is to be served today, I want to consider that Christ came to this earth to be a servant! In contrast with how many rulers of the Gentiles would lord it over others by their great authority, Jesus said, “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28). One example of Jesus’ service on earth was when He (the Son of God) performed the lowly service of washing the feet of His followers (John 13:1-17). And, the ultimate demonstration of His sacrificial service is seen in that He left Heaven (though He was God) and came down to earth to be obedient to His Father even to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11).

Husbands and fathers must imitate Christ’s example of sacrificial service in the home. The God-appointed head of the home is not there to be served! Instead, he is there to serve his family! He is there to look out for their best interests and sacrifice of himself (i.e. his time) in order to make sure that their

needs are met, including their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. They should have the same heart to be servants like Jesus, who even gave His life for His bride, the church. In fact, just prior to discussing the roles of husbands, wives, and children in Ephesians 5-6, Paul instructed Christians to be “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). So, even as the God-appointed head of the home, the husband must always seek to serve and look out for what is in the best interest of the other members of his family (compare with Philippians 2:3-4).

Involves physical leadership

Now, I want us to recognize that the head of the home should be concerned about leadership in two areas. We begin by considering the leadership he should provide in physical areas. There are many physical aspects of a home. And, someone must have the authority to lead in these areas.

The home involves the physical necessities of life. The home involves secular education. The home involves the management of money. The home involves recreation. The home involves physical care. The home involves training children to be good citizens, hard workers, etc. The home involves a place to live and managing that place.

Although the husband does not have to be an “expert” in all of these areas or make all of the decisions in these areas, he is the leader. Although he may get advice from others (primarily including his wife), he must always act according to Biblical wisdom and in his family’s best interest in all these areas. Ultimately, the direction he chooses to lead his family regarding these physical things is the direction his family *must* go (provided he does not lead them in a direction that is sinful).

Involves spiritual leadership

The physical elements of the home are the *least* important of the leadership that the husband and father must provide. For, husbands and fathers must recognize that the souls of their wives and children are the greatest responsibility of all! Although every member of the family possesses free will, husbands and fathers should do everything they can to lead the

members of their families in the ways of the Lord that will result in an everlasting home in Heaven.

In fact, whenever God teaches us about those who are to be the shepherds and overseers of a local church to look out for the spiritual wellbeing of the church, He says that these men must first have demonstrated their ability to lead their families in His ways (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Certainly, this must involve living a godly life in Christ Jesus himself that provides an example worth imitating for all his family. This also involves instructing his family in the ways of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

So, the husband and father should be focused on the spiritual needs of the family. Sadly, there are many families in which the husband and father is leading the family in all the physical areas, but he is absent regarding their spiritual lives. So, for instance, his children may have all their physical needs met and have many of the niceties of life, but may not be taken to worship God. Or, his children may have been given an excellent secular education to prepare them for their future employment, but may not have received a Bible education in the home to prepare them for eternity. This is a failure of the husband and father’s leadership at the greatest level, with eternal ramifications for both himself and the members of his family!

The importance of time

These are some great responsibilities of leadership that have been given to the husband and father! And, though the consequences of failing in these areas are great, the blessings are also great. Therefore, he should be committed to giving of his time in order that these responsibilities are fulfilled to the best of his ability.

In fact, there is no substitute for the husband and father spending time with his family. So, as the apostle Paul instructed Christians to redeem “the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16), there is no greater application of this than in the home. It will certainly take a great commitment of time to lead in the physical and spiritual ways we have been discussing. And, remember that, as a shepherd of the home modeled after Jesus Christ, he should know every member of his home and be

known by every member of the home. Therefore, he should make the best use of his time regarding his family.

Perhaps one of the greatest reasons homes fail is because the head of the home does not spend enough time with his family. Perhaps he has fallen for the “quality” time is more important than “quantity” reasoning offered by the world. However, there is no substitute for spending sufficient *quantities* of time with the family. If husbands and fathers do not do this, there will be a lack of familiarity between him and his “sheep.” Then, his leadership will be missing the kind of trust that is so crucial to any home.

So, husbands and fathers need to seriously evaluate how committed they are to spending time with their families. Not just *quality* time, but also time in sufficient *quantity*! It is certainly sad and devastating to a home whenever there is absenteeism on the part of the husband and father (whether caused by being out of town frequently, unnecessary overtime, the pursuit of personal hobbies and recreation, or just neglect)! It has been said that “love” is spelled “T-I-M-E.” And, there is certainly a lot of truth in that statement.

The Husband As Head Of His Wife

Up to this point, we have been focused on some general points concerning the husband and father as the head of the home, trying to understand what that leadership should look like. Now, we need to consider some additional specific responsibilities God has given him as head of his wife.

Love her

We considered love in great detail in lesson 2 of this study. But, it should be re-emphasized in this lesson also. For, in comparing the relationship between the husband and wife to Christ and the church, love is a crucial element. Listen to Ephesians 5:25-33.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

The bar for how the husband ought to love his wife has been set very high. Colossians 3:19 adds, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” The husband’s love must be a completely sacrificial kind of love, even willing to sacrifice his own life for her. Thus, he is always looking out for his wife’s best interests, whether those are her physical, emotional, or spiritual interests. His love for her is to be as great as his love for himself. Just as he does not desire any harm to befall his own body, he must make sure that she has everything that is beneficial for her.

Notice, specifically, that part of this responsibility involves nurturing and cherishing his wife. After all, the text says this is exactly what he does for his own body. Just as he treats his own body in a way that provides it with the best opportunity to grow and mature, he provides the right kind of care for his wife to grow and mature in the best way possible. And, just as he shows affection for himself in caring for all of his own needs, he makes sure that all of her needs are being met. Again, with this, I mean physical, emotional, and spiritual. This means that husbands must love their wives enough to invest themselves entirely in her complete wellbeing.

Work to provide for her

Although this point could be included in the last, I want to separate it for emphasis. Husbands

must work to provide for the physical needs of his wife. For instance, 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Now, let me be clear that I am *not* talking about those who want to work and are not able to do so (because of disability, inability to find work, etc.). But, those husbands who are unwilling to work so as to make sure that all his family’s physical needs are met are not right with God! In fact, God even says that if a man is not willing to work, he should not eat either and should be withdrawn from as walking disorderly and not according to the commandments of God (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

What kind of man is it who does not love his wife enough to work to provide for her physical needs? Is he really loving his wife like Christ loved the church? Remember that Jesus’ bride was spiritually bankrupt and destitute because of sin. And, His love caused Him to sacrifice Himself to leave Heaven, come to earth, suffer, and die so that she could be rich through His poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9). Surely, then, the husband should be committed to doing whatever he can to provide for the physical needs of his wife!

Dwell with understanding

Newsflash: Men and women are different, in many ways! So, husbands cannot deal with their wives in the same way that they would deal with another man. But, rather than becoming frustrated and angry toward his wife regarding these areas of differences, he is to live with her in an understanding kind of way. 1 Peter 3:7 says, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Husbands must recognize that their wives have different physical and emotional needs than he may have. And, rather than expecting her to become like him, he must seek to understand her needs and do his best to fulfill them. In addition, she has spiritual needs he must seek to understand.

Now, I am sure that list of needs wives have from their husbands is too lengthy to list here. And, some of these may differ from wife to wife (as each one is unique). But, I have some good news for husbands. You don’t have to understand *women!* You only must understand *your wife!* Listening is going to prove to be essential to doing this. Although I cannot explain all the needs of your wife to you and marriage “experts” cannot explain all the needs of your wife to you, your wife can. You just need to devote the time to really listen to her. As James 1:19 teaches, you should be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

Show her honor

Although husbands may often emphasize that their wives must show them respect (as Ephesians 5:33 teaches), God demands that husbands show honor to their wives. Once again, 1 Peter 3:7 says, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Husbands must demonstrate great loving care and treat their wives with the utmost respect. I am reminded of the Scriptures that teach about the great blessings wives are to their husbands. For instance, Proverbs 18:22 says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.” And, concerning the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31, we are told, “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies” (verse 10). Then, the text says that “Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her” (verse 28).

I believe the picture in 1 Peter 3:7 is that of a priceless piece of pottery. Now, you would not treat this vessel carelessly. Instead, you would make great effort to care for it and make sure that it is not broken. So, husbands should recognize that women have been designed differently than men and should not use their wives in ways that will cause her to break (physically, emotionally, or spiritually).

Finally, we should notice the consequences of failing in this regard. If husbands do not treat their wives in the proper way, they will have their prayers hindered. So, husbands must treat their wives in a

way that honors them as an heir of “the grace of life,” both physically and spiritually (if they are Christians).

The Father As Head Of His Children

Having established some specific responsibilities husbands have toward their wives, we should consider some specific responsibilities fathers have toward their children. For, he cannot lead his home in a way that pleases God without fulfilling these responsibilities. For now, let’s consider an overview of some responsibilities, as we will focus on raising children in more detail in another lesson.

Provide for their needs

The responsibility husbands have to provide for the physical needs of their wives extend to fathers providing for their children. This *should* go without saying. Unfortunately, it does not. For, there are many fathers who do not work to provide for their own. Instead, they are willing to allow others to support them (i.e. their wives, their children, the government, etc.). Again, I am speaking about men who are able to work. And, there are men who relinquish their role of providing for their families to their wives and play “Mr. Mom” while their wives work.

Now, although these things may be acceptable in some cultures in this world, it should not be acceptable to those who are Christians! God’s blueprint teaches us that husbands and fathers must work to provide for the needs of their family members (1 Timothy 5:8) and that wives and mothers must be keepers/workers at home (Titus 2:4-5).

God was not being chauvinistic or old-fashioned whenever He said this. Rather, He simply knew what was best for all the members of the home! In fact, families can often be seen breaking down physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually whenever these roles are changed. So, the husband must work to provide for all of his family so that he makes it

possible for his wife to fulfill her role as keeper and worker at home. In doing so, please remember that a family’s standard of living should not be allowed to override God’s blueprint! God has said, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Provide instruction

Children must be trained. And, while mothers have a great part in this work, fathers still must take the lead in this training. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” Now, fathers must recognize that “the way he should go” involves both physical and spiritual components. And, he should work to train his children in both.

Certainly, the primary area a father should desire to train his children is pertaining to the ways of the Lord. For instance, this responsibility is given specifically to fathers in Ephesians 6:4. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Speaking of Abraham, the Lord said, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:19).

Fathers should be like Manoah (Samson’s father). Whenever it was revealed to him that he would have a son, Manoah “prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘O my Lord, please let the Man of God [the Angel of the Lord] whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born” (Judges 13:8). Whenever the Angel of Lord appeared to Manoah, Manoah said, “Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?” (Judges 13:12). The point is simply this: Fathers should be considering the way in which their children ought to go (especially on a spiritual level). And, they should be committed to providing the necessary instruction to help them get to that place!

Provide loving discipline

God's blueprint for raising children involves parents who provide discipline whenever it is appropriate. And, as the head of the home, fathers will lead the way in this regard. In fact, it is a necessary part of training children. Although some parents may claim that they love their children too much to discipline them, godly parents ought to love their children too much *not* to discipline them!

Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly." Proverbs 23:13-14 says, "Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell." In discussing the chastening God shows to His children, the Hebrew writer asks, "for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Hebrews 12:7).

Fathers must carry out this unpleasant task as an essential part of training their children. But, it is to be carried out in love, not in hostility or anger! Remember that the punishment is for the *good* of the child, not for the good of your own emotions and fits of anger! So, fathers must execute their training (which includes discipline) in a way that does not provoke their children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). Colossians 3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

Conclusion

Husbands and fathers have been given a role of great responsibility in the home. In many ways, the success of the home depends upon whether they lead according to God's blueprint. At a minimum, a failure to lead the family in this way will place an unnecessary burden on the backs of every member of the home. But, whenever men fulfill this role according to God's pattern, it is a wonderful thing for everyone involved! So, God is searching for men to step up and be real men who will provide the kind of loving leadership for their homes as Jesus Christ provides for His church!

Study Questions

How is Satan trying to destroy the role of the husband and father in the home?

1. The Man Is The Head Of The Home

Who has given the man this role? Provide evidence for your answer.

What kind of leadership must the husband and father provide for the home?

How does this leadership involve physical leadership?

How does this leadership involve spiritual leadership?

How is time so important to this leadership?

2. The Husband As Head Of His Wife

Explain the husband's responsibility to love his wife.

Explain the husband's responsibility to work to provide for his wife.

Explain the husband's responsibility dwell with his wife in an understanding way.

Explain the husband's responsibility to show his wife honor.

3. The Father As Head Of His Children

Explain the father's responsibility to provide for his children's needs.

Explain the father's responsibility to provide instruction for his children.

Explain the father's responsibility to provide loving discipline for his children.

Lesson 5:

God's Blueprint For The Wife And Mother

God has given each member of the home a specific role to fulfill. As the Architect of the home, He is the one who knows how the home will be the most successful. So, if we are interested in building according to God's blueprint, we must observe these roles and fulfill them to the very best of our abilities.

The roles in the home are not up to our own private interpretations or opinions. Instead, we must recognize that God has carefully assigned each one. As such, every role is crucial to the wellbeing of the home. The role of the wife and mother is no different.

Although we have discussed the fact that the man has been designated by God as the head of the home, perhaps we could then say that the woman is the backbone of the home. Her role (though not the same in authority) is critical to the success of the home. It is sad to see the success, then, that Satan has had in convincing both men and women that women should seek other roles besides the one God has assigned. The results have truly been devastating!

You see, Satan is trying to convince men and women that God's roles for women are "old-fashioned," "out-of-date," "oppressive," and "demeaning." Thus, as Satan succeeds in this regard, he succeeds in pulling homes into chaos and danger. So, we must consider the true value and beauty of a virtuous woman fulfilling her God-given role in the

home. Not only will this be in the best interest of her soul and her family, but it will also be the only role that will lead her to experience the greatest fulfillment in life.

The Virtuous Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31 provides all women a God-given model to emulate in the home. But, before we study the description of this woman, I want to make two observations. First, this passage records advice that a mother gave to her son (who was either king or would become king, Proverbs 31:1). So, men should look to this passage as advice for what they ought to look for in a wife. Second, this is not some "superwoman" standard that cannot be achieved by women today (or else this passage would be useless advice to a son who was seeking a wife). Instead, all women today can demonstrate the same level of virtue, diligence, and care that this woman demonstrated toward her family.

Verse 10

"Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). Here is a woman of strength, courage, and excellence. She demonstrates this excellence in every area of her life – in her marriage, in her work as a mother, etc. As we will see, this woman always works diligently for the good of her family. And, the question, "Who can find a virtuous wife?" does not imply that she *cannot* be found. Rather, it implies that she is *rare* and extremely valuable (far above rubies)! She is diligent and passionate about everything that she does. She *excels*. She is far from *mediocre* as a wife and mother. Therefore, as we will see later, this is a woman who will be praised.

Verse 11

"The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain" (Proverbs 31:11). Trust is an essential part of any successful home. Every member should have confidence that all the others are acting in the best interest of the family. The virtuous woman does this. Wives are often left

to take care of the most important physical things that their husbands have. Her responsibilities include taking care of his physical needs (i.e. preparing his meals and clothes), taking care of his children and tending to their needs, managing household affairs, etc. In addition to this, there is no one who should share a greater emotional bond with her husband than her. Thus, she holds his secrets, his fears, his anxieties, his insecurities, etc. But, this woman has proven herself to be so worthy of her husband's trust that he never has to concern himself with any of these things that have been entrusted to her. He knows that "gain" will be experienced in everything that his wife touches.

Verse 12

"She does him good and not evil All the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:12). Since she has proven herself to be excellent and trustworthy, his heart is assured that she will be working for the good of the home in everything that she does. He is not concerned about her making decisions that undermine the wellbeing of his family. She prospers in the things that she does and provides a peace of mind to her husband that is invaluable to him! She never takes a "day off" from working for the good of her family.

Verse 13

"She seeks wool and flax, And willingly works with her hands" (Proverbs 31:13). Notice that this woman has a knowledge of how to take care of her family. She seeks out the things that she needs (i.e. wool and flax), likely so that she can prepare clothing for her family. But, she is not just knowledgeable of how to do the tasks that her family needs her to do, she is also a *willing* worker. This woman is proven to be a hard worker throughout this passage. Here she is seen putting her knowledge to work to take care of her family's needs.

Verse 14

"She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar" (Proverbs 31:14). She seeks out the things that her family needs and enjoys to the best of her ability. Like merchant ships, she is willing to go to great lengths to accomplish this work. Perhaps

this even shows her industrious nature in being willing to make trades in order to give her family the things that she could not otherwise provide them. Again, the good of her family is her focus.

Verse 15

"She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants" (Proverbs 31:15). The fact that this virtuous wife had maidservants does not discount her diligence in her work. Actually, it enhances it. Notice that even though she has maidservants, she is the one who is rising "while it is yet night" (before daybreak) in order to make sure that her household and maidservants have everything they need for the day. Therefore, this woman is not a lazy woman who stays in bed while her family is up. Instead, she sees the need to rise early and make the necessary provisions for the day.

Verse 16

"She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard" (Proverbs 31:16). She is a woman of common sense and wisdom. Notice that she "considers" the field rather than acting rashly. She surely wants to make certain that it will be in the best interest of her family. She is industrious. Notice that it is from her own profit that she plants a vineyard. Therefore, she is not laying any undue burden upon the family because of her decisions. Instead, she is demonstrating such care in everything that she does that she is causing her family to prosper.

Verse 17

"She girds herself with strength, And strengthens her arms" (Proverbs 31:17). Although the Bible teaches husbands to show honor to their wives as to weaker vessels (1 Peter 3:7), this does not mean that women are so feeble they cannot work. Here is an excellent example of a woman who is not afraid of doing some hard work. Although husbands should recognize the physical limitations of their wives, wives should be diligent in doing whatever they are capable of doing to benefit the family. Notice also that she works to do even more in the future (i.e. she "strengthens" her arms). For, she

recognizes that her family is depending on her accomplishing her work.

Verse 18

“She perceives that her merchandise is good, And her lamp does not go out by night” (Proverbs 31:18). She sees the profit in her work. She does not “sell herself short” on what she has been working to accomplish. And, her diligence does not end when the sun goes down. Instead, she is even diligent in caring for her family into the night hours. Perhaps we would even say that this woman is always “on call.” She is never truly “off,” because she is always ready to respond to any need of her family.

Verse 19

“She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hand holds the spindle” (Proverbs 31:19). Here is another picture of this woman’s diligence in working to provide for her family. She is industrious, not just to buy the things that her family needs, but to work to provide for them. She has the knowledge of how to keep the home and see to it that the needs of her family are met to the best of her ability.

Verse 20

“She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20). She is not a selfish woman. And, she is not just concerned about the needs of her own family. She has a heart of compassion (like Jesus) and wants to help those who are less fortunate than she and her family. Therefore, she tries to do whatever is within her ability to help others. In doing so, she will certainly be teaching her family the value of caring for others, according to God’s command in Galatians 6:10. Thus, she recognizes the truth of Jesus’ teaching that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Verse 21

“She is not afraid of snow for her household. For all her household is clothed with scarlet” (Proverbs 31:21). She is not afraid of the challenging circumstances (i.e. of winter) that lie ahead because she has made diligent preparations for them. Neither she or her family will be caught unprepared because

she has been working toward this goal to see that her family is properly equipped to face the challenges as best she can (i.e. with the proper clothing). So, her foresight has saved her family from potential struggles and disaster.

Verse 22

“She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple” (Proverbs 31:22). Here is another picture of this woman’s industrious nature. Notice that she makes these things for herself. So, it is not that she, her family, and her home does not have nice things. But, she is willing to work for them. Although her focus must not be put on having fancy things (see 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:1-6), she is well-dressed.

Verse 23

“Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land” (Proverbs 31:23). Her husband is in a place of honor and respect among the people. The context implies that this is aided by having such a good companion in his wife. Certainly, such an excellent wife has played an important role in her husband’s success. And, because she does such an excellent job at caring for the things that have been entrusted to her, his heart can safely trust in the job she does and he can focus on the work that he needs to do (i.e. to support his family, to work for the Lord, etc.). Furthermore, there is nothing about his wife’s conduct that would take away from the respect and honor that he has.

Verse 24

“She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies sashes for the merchants” (Proverbs 31:24). This woman put the skills that she had to work in order to make a profit for her family. Using skills that she already possessed in taking care of her family, she made extra income for her family. Please note that in doing this, there is no indication that she left any of her other responsibilities undone. In fact, nothing about her work took away from her family. It only enhanced her contribution to the family.

Verse 25

“Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come” (Proverbs 31:25). Whenever she considers the future, she can look to it with joy and anticipation. The reason she can do this is because of how she has conducted her life in the past. Nothing in how she has conducted herself will cause her or her family to reap harmful effects. Instead, because of her wisdom, good stewardship, and godliness, there is only the expectation for good in the future for both herself and her family.

Verse 26

“She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26). First, she possesses wisdom and kindness herself. She works to learn and live according to the wisdom that comes from God and she treats everyone with respect. Then, she works to teach others these same ways. So, she does not give bad advice to others. And, she is certainly working diligently to teach these things to her children.

Verse 27

“She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness” (Proverbs 31:27). This woman recognizes that the care of her household is a primary responsibility in her life. And, she does not face this responsibility with dread, but embraces it and tries to take full advantage of it. She is not a “lazy housewife” by any means. Everything that has depicted her in this passage is such that she is a diligent and industrious worker who always looks out for the best interest of her family.

Verse 28

“Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28). Her diligent and loving care for her family does not go unnoticed. Although she does not do it for the praise, those who are in her household appreciate the diligent work that she does for them. Her children recognize the love of their mother when they are young and develop a greater appreciation for her as they get older, and her husband praises her for

her works. So, godly husbands and children appreciate and praise this virtuous woman. They do *not* make her feel like a piece of property, take advantage of her, or belittle her contribution! Instead, they recognize how important she really is to the wellbeing of the home.

Verse 29

“Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all” (Proverbs 31:29). The husband of this virtuous woman recognizes her true worth to him and his family. Although many women do *well* in their roles, he recognizes that his wife has excelled above every one of them! She has acted with such excellence and virtue in the interest of her family that everyone has prospered – in so many ways!

Verse 30

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). Although this woman may have been beautiful (from a physical perspective), she was so much more! Physical charm often deceives people and external beauty fades away. But, this woman fears God and lives in obedience to Him. This is why she has acted with such excellence in caring for her family. And, although the world puts its focus on physical beauty and charm, it is this virtuous woman who is worthy of praise!

Verse 31

“Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates” (Proverbs 31:31). No one has to make this woman “look good” to be appreciated. Instead, this woman’s work and loving care for her family have been apparent to everyone who has observed her. Therefore, the fruit of her own work will cause others to praise her for her diligence in serving the Lord and her family!

Applications and conclusions

Although this virtuous woman is found in the Old Testament, it remains unchanged as God’s inspired picture of a woman who is to be praised. Unfortunately, many will dismiss this picture of the virtuous woman as being an “impossible” fantasy.

Yet, all that we have observed is a woman with a deep commitment to please God and work in the best interest of her family. She is industrious and works hard to do this important work. Therefore, any and every woman is capable of setting her mind on being this virtuous woman!

The Virtuous Woman As Wife

Up to this point, we have been discussing a model that all wives and mothers would do well to emulate. Now, we want to get specific as to the roles God has assigned them in the home. Certainly, virtuous women will live in the fear of God and do their very best to fulfill their God-given responsibilities. Specifically, we first want to focus on the God-given role of the virtuous woman as a wife.

Live as a “help meet”

Whenever Adam was alone in the Garden of Eden, God saw that it was not a good situation and made a “helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18, a “help meet for him,” according to the *King James Version*). So, it is a fitting observation to recognize that men were not created for women, but women for men. God expects and desires for wives to provide suitable companionship and help to their husbands. She will do this only if she fulfills her God-given role in the home. Perhaps most of all, fulfilling this responsibility will require a time commitment, as she will be unable to be a suitable helper without committing time to her husband.

A wife has the great and unparalleled opportunity to either do a great amount of good for her husband or a great deal of harm to him. Listen to this reflected in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:4 says, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones.” Proverbs 18:22 says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.” Proverbs 11:22 says, “As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.” Proverbs 14:1 says, “The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.”

Proverbs 21:9 says, “Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” Proverbs 27:15-16 says, “A continual dripping on a very rainy day And a contentious woman are alike; Whoever restrains her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.” Clearly, either a wife will fulfill her God-intended role as a suitable helper for her husband or be a hindrance to him.

Love him

As we discussed in lesson 2, God expects love to be shown in every aspect of the home. This is no less true about the wife’s responsibility to love her husband. In fact, she should be committed to learning from older women how she should love her husband (Titus 2:4). This goes far beyond saying “I love you” and expressing romantic feelings.

The love that a wife must have for her husband is that she always acts in his best interest. So, she is aware of his needs (i.e. physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.). She is not focused on her own selfish desires and pursuits in life. Instead, as a suitable helper for him, she always conducts herself in a way that is good and beneficial for him (whether he recognizes and appreciates it or not).

Live in submission

Many in the world today will not like this point. Yet, God instructs women to be in submission to their husbands. Titus 2:5 says that the older women should train the younger women to be “obedient to their own husbands.” Ephesians 5:22-24 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” Colossians 3:18 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

1 Peter 3:1-6 says, “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—

arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

Wives are daughters of Sarah (the faithful daughter of God and wife of Abraham) *if* they will be submissive to their husbands. To “submit” is to yield to the will or desires of another. It is to be obedient to another. So, whenever there are differing opinions in the home, God has given the wife responsibility to yield her opinions and judgments to her husband (who is the leader of the family). And, notice that this is not just her responsibility whenever her husband makes the decision that she wants him to make. Instead, Ephesians 5:22-24 gives her this responsibility toward her husband “in everything” (as the church submits to Christ). Recognize that there must not be two heads of the home!

Unfortunately, husbands do not always provide their wives with the proper leadership and they use this commandment to their own selfish advantages. Still, this does not change the wife’s responsibility. Ultimately, she keeps this commandment in order to please the Lord, even if it means that she will not be treated well by her husband. There is only one exception that God has given to this submission. Remember that she is to submit to her own husband “as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). So, if there is ever anything that her husband demands from her that causes her to violate His commands or her role in the home (including her conscience), she must choose to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Show respect

In submitting to her husband, she does not show spite or contempt for God’s arrangement of the home. Instead, she is careful to show respect to her husband as the God-appointed head of the home. Ephesians 5:33 says, “Nevertheless let each one of

you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

So, she must not be going behind her husband’s back and acting contrary to his authority. She must not be putting him down in front of others. She must not always be second guessing his decisions. Instead, she must treat him with the respect that is due to one God has given authority.

Now, this certainly does *not* mean that she must always agree with her husband. However, just as Christians have the responsibility to submit to and respect the governing authorities and elders of the church even though they might not agree with their judgment (see Romans 13:1-7 and Hebrews 13:17), Christian wives must submit to and respect their husbands – as long as they do not cause their wives to violate God’s will. Ultimately, a Christian wife’s respect for her husband’s authority should stem from her respect for the Lord’s authority!

Keeper of the home

There has been a great shift in culture over the past several decades (one that shows no signs of slowing). Today, most women decide that they should get college educations and/or enter the workforce full-time in order to be the primary provider for the family or provide additional income to support their family’s standard of living. It is considered “old-fashioned” for women to be “homemakers.” Yet, this is exactly what God expects of wives.

Titus 2:4, again, teaches that the older women are to teach the younger women to be “homemakers” (Titus 2:4-5). The idea is that they are to have the rule over the domestic affairs of the home. So, God gives wives specific responsibility to keep the home. Therefore, the idea of women cooking for their husbands, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, etc. is not out-of-date for Christian wives. Instead, it is a key part of their God-given responsibilities as wives!

But, what about a woman who takes a secular job outside of the home? Sometimes this is done out of necessity (i.e. her husband cannot find work, her husband is disabled, her husband is unwilling to work, she is widowed, etc.). Sometimes, situations demand it. But, there are many situations in which

wives *choose* to work – not to meet actual *needs* but to have nicer things, out of the joy of pursuing a career, because she desires to get away from the home, etc. To these, we must simply recognize that while there are many Biblical examples of women working (i.e. the Proverbs 31 woman, Lydia, Priscilla, etc.), there are no approved Biblical examples of women working *at the expense* of fulfilling their roles as homemakers! Surely, Christian women (as well as men) must recognize that being homemakers according to God’s standards is a full-time responsibility that is full of blessings and fulfillment, and one that should not be quickly dismissed in pursuit of secular employment!

The Virtuous Woman As Mother

In addition to these responsibilities God has given to a Christian woman as wife, those who want to please God must also recognize their responsibilities as mothers. Certainly, a woman who is committed to excellence in the service of God and her family will do the very best she can to fulfill these roles.

Bear children

When addressing younger widows, Paul wrote, “Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Timothy 5:14). Having children is uniquely a role that only women are capable of fulfilling. And, this is one of their highest callings in life – as well as one of the most fulfilling! Although God does not look with despair upon women who are unable to bear children, Christian wives should consider the opportunity to do so a great privilege.

But, God does *not* just want women to bear children. Instead, He cares about how women will treat these children once they are born. He expects mothers to care for the welfare of their children, tend to their needs, etc. Just like we saw regarding husbands, this will require a great time commitment

from women to take care of their children in a way that would please God!

Love them

Just as Christian women must be trained to love their husbands, they also must be trained “to love their children” (Titus 2:4). Once again, they must always act in the best interest of their children – physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc. They must not be seeking their own selfish desires and ambitions above the wellbeing of their children.

While their children are very young, this loving care certainly includes feeding them, changing them, holding them, etc. But, as their children grow, this also includes teaching them how to function in society and behave in a way that would please God. Of course, what Christian mothers should love the most about their children is their souls! Therefore, they should not do anything to jeopardize the spiritual wellbeing of their children.

Train them

Although the father takes the lead in training, mothers have a great role. In fact, it will be the mother who implements much of the father’s training. After all, she is (as homemaker) the ruler of the household domestic affairs. This includes dealing with the children throughout the day (as their father may be away). So, she also must be committed to following God’s blueprint for raising children.

Listen to Proverbs 22:6 again (as we read in lesson 4). “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” This training will take time and requires three elements: A proper example, teaching, and discipline. It should be a tremendous comfort to a husband to know that while he works, his wife is committed to training his children in the way they ought to go!

A primary focus of her training ought to be spiritual. Remember, the virtuous woman fears the Lord (Proverbs 31:30). Therefore, she desperately desires to pass her knowledge of God’s word and the fear of the Lord on to her children. For instance, Paul said that “from childhood” Timothy had “known the Holy Scriptures” which were able to make him “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”

(2 Timothy 3:15). Earlier in the letter, Paul acknowledged that this was due to the fact that his grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) passed on their faith to him (2 Timothy 1:5).

Keep the home

Being a keeper of the home (the ruler of the domestic household affairs) is not just applicable to how the wife treats her husband, but also to her children (Titus 2:4-5). Again, 1 Timothy 5:14 says that younger widows were to remarry, bear children, and “manage the house.” This is even more of a full-time responsibility than just taking care of a husband!

Christian mothers should make sure that their houses are in order (i.e. things are in their places, the vacuum cleaner is run), meals are prepared for the wellbeing of their children, clean clothes are ready, broken things are mended, the dirty dishes are cleaned and put away, school work is done well, etc. After all, Christian mothers should recognize that their example is also working to train their daughters how to manage the home and shows their sons what to look for in a future wife. Furthermore, mothers need to be around the home in order to make sure that their children are behaving properly throughout the day. It is sad that many mothers *choose* to neglect these responsibilities and leave their children to take care of themselves, watch themselves (we often call these “latchkey children”), or be entrusted to the care of another. Mothers, please know that your children need you around the house (whether they know it or not)! There is no substitute for a mother who manages the house well!

Conclusion

Wives and mothers have been given an extremely important and valuable role to fulfill in the home. Although this role is often frowned upon by the world, the negative effects of wives and mothers failing to fulfill their God-given roles as virtuous women are felt every day in the majority of homes in this world! The consequences of failing in this role are too severe and the benefits of fulfilling this role are too great to neglect. So, God is searching for

women who will commit themselves to rising above the standards set by the world and humble themselves before *Him* in order to do His work for their families!

Study Questions

How is Satan trying to destroy the role of the wife and other in the home?

1. The Virtuous Woman

Describe the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:

*Verse 10 –

*Verse 11 –

*Verse 12 –

*Verse 13 –

*Verse 14 –

*Verse 15 –

*Verse 16 –

*Verse 17 –

*Verse 18 –

*Verse 19 –	Explain the wife’s responsibility to love her husband.
*Verse 20 –	
*Verse 21 –	Explain the wife’s responsibility to submit to her husband.
*Verse 22 –	
*Verse 23 –	Explain the wife’s responsibility to respect her husband.
*Verse 24 –	
*Verse 25 –	Explain the wife’s responsibility to be the keeper of the home.
*Verse 26 –	
*Verse 27 –	3. The Virtuous Woman As Mother
*Verse 28 –	Explain the woman’s responsibility to bear children.
*Verse 29 –	
*Verse 30 –	Explain the mother’s responsibility to love her children.
*Verse 31 –	
	Explain the mother’s responsibility to train her children.
	Explain the mother’s responsibility to be a homemaker for her children.

What applications can you make from this text? Is it possible for women today to be this virtuous woman?

2. The Virtuous Woman As Wife

Explain the wife’s responsibility to live as a “help meet.”

Lesson 6:

God's Blueprint For Children

The roles God has assigned in the home do not end with the husband, father, wife, and mother. Instead, everyone in the home has a God-assigned role. This includes however many children there are in the home. Once again, God has assigned these roles knowing what will make the home the greatest possible success.

Children are great blessings from God. However, children must also be taught their God-given role. It is not something that just comes naturally. For, many children are not taught their appropriate role in the home and cause great distress to the home.

In so many ways, the home is a training ground for life. As Proverbs 22:6 teaches, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." While we will focus on this passage as it relates to parents in the next lesson, we need to appreciate it from the perspective of children.

Satan is trying to destroy the next generation by interfering with this training. He knows that if he can convince parents to train their children in ways that do not honor God, he will be largely successful in taking control of the next generation. And, he knows that if he can get children not to fulfill their role in the home, it will go a long way to interfere with them fulfilling their role toward their Heavenly

Father later in life. So, it is vitally important that children be brought up in homes that train in the way God desires and that teaches them the importance of fulfilling their role.

Wise Children

As children grow, they need to be taught the value of possessing wisdom that will uphold and guide them throughout their lives. But, this wisdom is not something that they are born with. Instead, it is something that must be acquired. Even Jesus as a child "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). And, one of the first signs of wisdom is a child who learns from the wisdom his/her parents have acquired through the years. So, let's consider some things the Scriptures say about wise children (particularly the book of Proverbs).

Proverbs 13:1

"A wise son heeds his father's instruction, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1). Let's observe the fact that there is such a thing as a "wise son" (or daughter). Now, let's also acknowledge that this does not happen by chance. Some children do not just get "lucky" and win some kind of genetic favor that makes them predisposed to being wise. While there are children who are born into better earthly circumstances than others, not a single child is born wise!

Listen to Proverbs 22:15: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him." Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." Both of these passages demonstrate that a child has not learned wisdom's ways whenever he/she was born. Instead, this comes through the determined work of both parents and child. It is truly unfortunate, then, whenever children do not have loving and wise parents who will drive foolishness out of them!

Notice that a "wise son" listens to his father's instructions (Proverbs 13:1). Thus, children should determine to listen to the instructions of their parents,

recognizing that they have much to learn! But, the one who does not listen to rebuke (correction) is a “scoffer” (mocker). Such a one is not interested in wisdom’s way. Instead, he makes a mockery of it and will suffer the consequences later in life (compare with Proverbs 1:20-33).

As you consider the contrast between a wise and foolish child, listen to Proverbs 10:1 and Proverbs 15:20. Proverbs 10:1 says, “The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.” Proverbs 15:20 says, “A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother.”

If a child will listen to the instructions and rebuke of his/her parents, that child will make his/her parents glad and proud. The parents of this child will be able to watch the child enjoy the kinds of success (both physically and spiritually) that wisdom brings. However, the child who does not choose to listen to the instructions and rebuke of his/her parents will be a source of grief to his/her parents and will show contempt for his/her parents. The parents of this child will watch the child make decisions that result in the kinds of suffering and harm (both physically and spiritually) that foolishness brings. And, both children reflect the kind of job the parents have done in training them in the way they should go and driving foolishness out of the heart of the child.

Proverbs 1:8-9

“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck” (Proverbs 1:8-9). The “graceful ornament” on the head and “chains” around the neck were signs of glory and marks of distinction. But, notice that it is the instruction of the father and law of the mother that is equal to such signs.

Children must be devoted to learning the wisdom of their parents. This (so long as the parents are truly wise) will save the children from a great deal of suffering. Instead of experiencing the consequences of foolish decisions and actions, these children will excel at the things they do in life and in the favor of God. Thus, they will be truly different

from all the other children who have neglected to learn wisdom from their parents.

Proverbs 4:1-9

“Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, He also taught me, and said to me: ‘Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you.’”

Actually, you could read this entire chapter to learn about the value of learning wisdom from your parents (as the book of Proverbs is primarily written from the perspective of a father addressing his son concerning wisdom’s ways). Once again, children must value the wisdom that parents try and instill in them. These wise ways must not be forsaken. Instead, they must be retained and not forgotten.

Notice that wisdom is “the principle thing.” Other translations reflect that getting wisdom is the beginning of wisdom. Therefore, children must determine to seek out wisdom. God and their parents ought to be the primary teachers of this wisdom. And, this wisdom will result in some wonderful blessings. The text says that wisdom will bring about life and preservation. Wisdom will keep and promote you. Wisdom will bring honor and glory.

Proverbs 6:20-25

“My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the

way of life, To keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids” (Proverbs 6:20-25).

I want to emphasize the portion of this text that states the father’s command and the mother’s law should be always bound on your heart and tied around your neck. Wise children do not rebel against their parents’ instructions and rules whenever they leave the house and get away from the parents. Instead, the wisdom and instructions given by the parents should be ever-present in their lives.

They should appreciate that the instructions and rules set by their parents are for their own good. For instance, this passage speaks of these commandments and law as a lamp to light the way in life and keep the children from the evil woman and seductress. A child who casts away the instructions and wisdom of his/her parents upon leaving the house or being out of the presence of his/her parents may fall for the trap that is set by this seductress. The result (as is demonstrated throughout the rest of the chapter) is suffering and consequences.

Yet, the principle is applicable to any element of the parents’ instruction and law. It should be valued and appreciated by the children. It ought to be engrained into the very moral fibers of who the children are in order that it might help and protect them from the challenges they will face throughout life. Wise children will cling to these instructions and laws in this way. Foolish children will quickly disregard them.

Proverbs 15:5

“A fool despises his father’s instruction. But he who receives correction is prudent” (Proverbs 15:5). The number of rebellious children in this world indicate that the children who choose the pursue foolishness far outnumber the children who pursue wisdom. It is quite common for children to speak in negative ways concerning the rules their parents have given and the way their parents choose to discipline.

Although there are certainly cases when children are abused and hated by their parents, this passage is not addressing such a situation. Instead, it

is common for children to speak of their parents in disrespectful ways due simply to the fact that they do not like to be restrained. And, not only do children often verbally express their disrespect toward their parents, but it is also apparent whenever they choose not to listen to their parents’ instruction.

In contrast, there are some children who choose the way of wisdom and prudence (cautiousness). They demonstrate respect for the wisdom and authority that is possessed by their parents and choose to listen to their instructions and corrections. They are determined to receive the correction and training that is given by their parents, recognizing the love that their parents have for them.

Proverbs 23:22

“Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22). Parents deserve to be listened to. Their children would have no life without them. They have much more experience at living life and facing the challenges life brings than their children. So, children ought to not only listen to their parents, but should also seek out the advice of their parents.

Now, let me say something about the age of parents for the benefit of the children. Children often despise the age of their parents and claim that their parents have forgotten how it is to be young. Or, they claim that times have changed so much that the wisdom of their parents is no longer relevant. Therefore, their rules and punishments are often viewed as being “old fashioned” and “out of style.”

However, this is mere foolishness on the part of children. As far as wisdom is concerned, age is more of an asset than a detriment. As long as an individual has sought wisdom throughout life, age has provided more opportunities to gain wisdom than the young have had. So, children must not despise the age of their parents. Instead, their age should be a cause for greater respect and a greater desire to listen to the wisdom their parents have gained throughout their lives.

Then, as we will observe a bit later, this respect should continue throughout the life of the child. As time passes and parents continue to age, they will experience any number of difficulties

because of their increased age. But, rather than despising the “burden” that this places on the lives of the children, there should be a commitment to repay the love and care they had been shown by their parents throughout their lives!

The Responsibility Of Wise Children Toward Their Parents

All children will have a choice to make very early in their lives. They must decide whether they will pursue wisdom or foolishness. Parents must do their very best to instill the value of pursuing wisdom in the hearts of the children early on so that they will make that decision for themselves whenever they become personally accountable before God. Now, let’s consider some specific responsibilities God gives to those who are children. Although these are the responsibilities every child must fulfill, only wise children will fulfill them.

Obey their parents

Wise children obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1 says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.”

God is the source of all true wisdom. There is nothing He does not know and no true wisdom that does not belong to Him. Therefore, it is important to recognize that He has always expected children to be obedient to their parents. That is, they must live *under* the rule and direction of their parents. They are not free to live in whatever way they desire, regardless of what their parents instruct.

God knows what happens whenever children live according to their own whims and desires without having gained the wisdom that should guide their decisions and actions. Proverbs 30:11-12 says, “There is a generation that curses its father, And does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness.”

Then, Proverbs 30:17 says, “The eye that mocks his father, And scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.”

Now, let’s consider the extent to which God expects children to obey their parents. Colossians 3:20 instructs children to obey their parents “in all things.” Although children would often rather not listen to what their parents instruct them to do, God gives them no option in the matter. God’s rule is that children obey their parents in all circumstances. So, even though a child may be doing something else at a given moment or may not like to do what his/her parents instruct, he/she still has the God-given responsibility to obey!

And, please recognize that this responsibility concerns both “parents.” Although it is true that the father is the head of the family, the child’s responsibility of obedience also includes the mother. Both have authority from God over the child.

There is only one acceptable exception to this rule. The child’s primary responsibility is to obey God (as we will discuss a bit later). So, if there is something that is instructed by the parents that is contrary to the commandments of the Lord, the child must obey God rather than men – even his/her parents (Acts 5:29). This may be suggested in Ephesians 6:1 by the phrase (“in the Lord”). Again, the passage says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

Although the general rule and principles we have been discussing throughout this lesson is one of respecting the wisdom and instructions of your parents, we must consider the reality that some children are taught and instructed to do things that are contrary to the will of God. And, although children must obey and respect their parents in all things, this simply does *not* apply in situations that would cause children to be disobedient to God!

For instance, Jesus taught (in Matthew 10:34-39) that those who follow Him will, sometimes, even be divided from their parents. But, even though children must sometimes choose between following the Lord and following their parents, those who choose to follow the Lord will be rewarded! Jesus says, “He who loves father or mother more than Me

is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (verses 37-39).

Honor their parents

Not only must children obey their parents in all things (unless it is contrary to God’s ways), but they must also honor their parents. Ephesians 6:2-3 continues the instruction to children, “‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’”

One sign of wisdom is to respect others who have wisdom. This certainly should include the parents of a child. This honor toward parents was even part of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:12 says, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

Now, how is this commandment the “first commandment with promise” (as Ephesians 6:2-3 says). The fifth of the Ten Commandments is the first commandment given in the Mosaic Law that had a specific promise attached to it (beyond the general promises of obeying God). The promise to the Israelites was that if they honored their fathers and mothers they would have their days prolonged in the land God was going to give them (the land of Canaan). It takes a more general form in Ephesians 6 that applies to children today, saying that it will be well with them and they will live long on the earth.

Although this is no guarantee against tragedy, the simple fact of the matter is that children who live to honor their parents generally experience fewer self-inflicted hardships and struggles in their childhood and throughout their lives. This is the direct result of applying wisdom to their lives rather than ignoring wisdom and experiencing the consequences of foolishness. So, children who honor their fathers and mothers will, generally, live longer and more prosperous lives than those who do not because they will not experiment with the sins and crimes that bring about suffering and consequences

(think about what results from consuming alcohol, sexually promiscuous activity, gambling, theft, consuming tobacco products, drugs, choosing the wrong friends, etc.).

Actually, it was even part of the Law of Moses that children who did not show honor to their parents were to be put to death. This is how serious of an offense this was. For instance, Exodus 21:15 says, “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” Exodus 21:17 says, “And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.” While the consequences of violating this law is not physical death under the new covenant of Jesus Christ, this does *not* mean that the offense is not as bad today. In fact, God will hold children (even grown children) who have reached the age of accountability responsible on the Day of Judgment for whether or not they have shown honor to their earthly parents.

But, in what ways should children show honor to their parents? One clear way of honoring your parents is by obeying them (as we have previously discussed). Another way this honor must be shown is through a respect for one’s parents. You must respect them for being in a God-given position of authority over you and should respect their wisdom and instructions (whether you like what they have said or not). This respect even extends to the times when your parents discipline you. As you grow, you should recognize that (hopefully) their discipline was out of love and for your own good (see Proverbs 15:5, 10 and Proverbs 13:24).

Then, this honor should not stop whenever you are grown and leave the home. For instance, all children (whether old or young) can express their thankfulness to their parents. After all, their parents have given them life, taken care of them, trained them, spent money on them, worked to provide for their needs, loved them, etc., etc., etc. And, all children should look for opportunities to show honor to their parents by repaying their parents (as we will discuss in a few moments).

Learn from their parents

Wise children learn from their parents. I have been stressing this point throughout this lesson. But,

let me give it some more attention here. Children are subject to their parents' training. And, if that training is according to the will of God, this is a wonderful blessing for the child.

A child knows very little whenever he/she is born. To function properly in this world and to serve God, he/she will have to be trained. Unfortunately, there are many children in this world who have such disregard for their parents that they do not have any interest in learning from them.

Rather than listening to their parents, many children feel the need to "re-invent the wheel." So, what they could have learned quickly takes a much longer time because they are not willing to learn from their parents who have already acquired the knowledge. Or, many mistakes are repeated and suffering is experienced because children do not take the time to learn from the wisdom of their parents who want to keep them from making those mistakes.

Children should recognize what the goal of parenting should be. It is summarized by Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." Parents ought to be proactively working to equip their children to go in the way that they should go (i.e. the way that will be most profitable for them). Therefore, if children do not learn from the training their parents provide, the implication is that they will go in the way they should *not* go.

Repay their parents

The honor that children should show to their parents does *not* just apply to the time they are in their parents' homes. Instead, even as children and parents age, there should be a continued honor shown to parents. Remember what Proverbs 23:22 said. "Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old."

Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 5:3-8 are especially applicable on this point. "Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Verse 16 adds, "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows."

In giving instructions concerning the church financially caring for its widows, Paul limits the church's responsibility. Among other things, he says that a widow's family has the responsibility to take care of her before the church does. So, her children and grandchildren are expected to fulfill their God-given duty toward her by repaying all that she has done for them (i.e. in raising them, teaching them, sacrificing for them, etc.). If a child or grandchild does not fulfill this responsibility to the best of his/her own ability, then he/she has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

So, there is responsibility to pay back our parents (and even our grandparents) and relieve their needs. Although the specific teaching in this verse applies to the financial relief of widows, I believe the principle is much broader than this. What kind of honor does a child or grandchild show if he/she does not do everything within his/her ability to relieve the needs he/she sees in a parent or grandparent?

Yet, there are many parents and grandparents who struggle on a daily basis to pay their bills, to get to doctor's appointments, to maintain their houses, to mow their grass, to shovel their sidewalks, etc., etc., etc. And, there are many children and grandchildren who are too quick to put their aging family members into a "home" so that others will take care of them. Although I recognize that there are situations when this may be necessary (due to the specialized care that is required), I am speaking of situations in which the children or grandchildren do not do all that they can to repay their parents and grandparents. This is very sad and God is not pleased!

The Responsibility Of Wise Children Toward Their Heavenly Father

Everyone who studies this lesson is a child (although your parents may not be living any longer). And, it is my sincere hope that you will choose to be a wise child and fulfill all of your responsibilities toward your parents. Then, we also need to consider the fact that every member of the home who is a Christian should be wise in fulfilling their responsibilities toward their Heavenly Father. And, even the smallest of children who are too young to become Christians must be trained to fulfill these responsibilities. Although there is much that we could discuss, let's focus on three simple points for the sake of this lesson.

Remember Him

Wise children will remember their Creator. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" Although it is common for young people to want to sow their "wild oats" and enjoy carefree living during their youth, this is *not* what God wants from them.

Although He wants young people to enjoy their youth (Ecclesiastes 11:9), He wants these young people to remember Him during this time in their lives and remember that they will be judged for all the things they do – even during this time (see Ecclesiastes 11:9-10). He wants them to put evil away from their lives and live to serve Him in all things.

God also wants children to recognize that there are difficult days coming (as is depicted in 12:1-8). As one grows older, there are increasing struggles that are experienced as a natural part of the aging process. So, before one must contend with these difficulties, God wants the young to remember Him.

Now, I want to go a little bit deeper. I mentioned earlier that the home is a training ground

to help children serve God. As children are taught to remember their parents who gave them physical life and have provided for them, we must recognize the need to remember our ultimate Creator and Provider (the Giver and Sustainer of all life, both physical and spiritual). This remembrance of Him ought to impact our lives in such a way that we remember Him and His will in every decision that we make.

Fear Him

Wise children will also fear God. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil."

There are two essential elements to the fear of God. The first is a reverential respect. Again, I want you to appreciate how the respect you should have been trained to have for your earthly parents ought to help you appreciate your Heavenly Father. Although your earthly parents were imperfect, your Heavenly Father is perfect. He has perfect knowledge and wisdom. He has perfect love. He has perfect discipline. He has perfect judgment. He has perfect authority. He has perfect care in every way. Therefore, everything that you do in your life should reflect a reverential respect and honor for God!

Then, another element to the fear of God is a terror of failing to obey God. As you considered the power and authority that your earthly parents had, you should have recognized that they could punish your disobedience. This should have caused some degree of fear toward rebelling against your parents and served as a deterrent to your rebellion. And, you must recognize that God has even greater power and authority. So, if you choose not to obey Him, you must recognize that He has promised to punish you with great punishment (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 and Revelation 21:8). This should cause you to fear rebelling against Him and serve as a deterrent for your rebellion.

Keep His commandments

Wise children will keep God's commandments. This was also seen in Ecclesiastes

12:13-14. We have previously studied the responsibility that children have to be obedient to their earthly parents. Now, learning such submission to earthly parents should help you be obedient to your Heavenly Father.

God warns you that there is a Day of Judgment that is coming. On this Day, everything that you have done, thought, and said in your life will be judged. Nothing will be excluded. Even those things you thought had been done in secret (perhaps even unknown to your earthly parents) will be judged. This is because your Heavenly Father knows and sees everything (see Proverbs 15:3).

So, as you live your life (as a child, a man, or a woman), you must live to keep the commandments of God. There is nothing as important in life as fearing God (in the ways we have discussed) and keeping His commandments. According to Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, this is your whole duty in living life on this earth. Then, on that Day of Judgment, you will be welcomed to spend eternity with God in Heaven!

Conclusion

Children have an important role to fulfill in the home. Whether they fulfill this role or not will greatly impact their lives. And, as children become older and are accountable to God, whether or not they fulfill these responsibilities will impact whether they are pleasing to God. Ultimately, all children must remember their Creator most of all and determine to fear Him and keep His commandments! If children will fulfill these responsibilities, it will be well with them (at least on a spiritual level)!

Study Questions

How is Satan trying to destroy the next generation by convincing children not to fulfill their role in the home?

1. Wise Children

What does Proverbs 13:1 teach about wise children?

What does Proverbs 1:8-9 teach about wise children?

What does Proverbs 4:1-9 teach about wise children?

What does Proverbs 6:20-25 teach about wise children?

What does Proverbs 15:5 teach about wise children?

What does Proverbs 23:22 teach about wise children?

2. The Responsibility Of Wise Children Toward Their Parents

Explain the child's responsibility to obey his/her parents.

Explain the child's responsibility to honor his/her parents.

Explain the child's responsibility to learn from his/her parents.

Explain the child's responsibility to repay his/her parents

3. The Responsibility Of Wise Children Toward Their Heavenly Father

Explain the child's responsibility to remember his/her Heavenly Father.

Explain the child's responsibility to fear his/her Heavenly Father.

Explain the child's responsibility to keep the commandments of his/her Heavenly Father.

Lesson 7:

God's Blueprint For Raising Children

Being a parent is one of the greatest responsibilities and opportunities that can ever be afforded to us while we live on this earth. Not only do you share your life and your love with your children in a unique kind of way, but you are responsible for their spiritual training. Just think about it for a moment. Whenever you helped to give your children life, you became partly responsible for a soul that will exist throughout eternity!

Thus, there are both physical and spiritual responsibilities involved in raising children. Physically, they will need to be trained in all of the ways that will be useful for them in living life on this earth. Spiritually, they will need to be trained to have such a strong faith in God that they will make the decision to follow Him when they are older.

Think back over the things we discussed in lesson 6, regarding God's blueprint for children to become wise by listening to their parents. This is what God wants children to do. Now, as we focus on parenting, we must recognize how successful Satan will be with our children if he can get the parents to train their children in ways that are not according to God's wisdom! Just think about what will happen to children who are fulfilling their God-given responsibility to learn from and obey their parents if

their parents are leading them on a path that results in physical harm and/or spiritual destruction!

Sadly, Satan is having great success in destroying the next generation from the very earliest points in their lives by setting a foundation for them that they will often not overcome. So, as parents who are interested in following God, we must follow His blueprint for how to raise children who will walk according to God's wisdom – physically and spiritually. Fortunately, although God has *not* spelled out what we should do in every situation we encounter, He has provided us a blueprint to follow and apply to the various situations we face as parents.

Train Up A Child

If there is one verse in the Bible that properly sums up the responsibility parents have, it is Proverbs 22:6. "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." Let's spend some time, then, considering this verse and its various components.

Train up a child

Let's begin at the most basic point regarding this passage: A child must be trained. Recall that foolishness is in the heart of a child prior to training. For instance, Proverbs 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him." Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

Children are not born into this world knowing all that they need to know about living on this earth. Instead, from the time they are born, every day is about learning something new that will be used in their lives. Early on, they learn how to complete the simplest of tasks: Keeping their eyes open, eating, sitting up, standing up, crawling, walking, running, using the bathroom, etc. But, as they grow, they learn about things that will impact what they recognize to be right and wrong and face decisions of great consequence to their future.

As children grow and make decisions, then, one of two things will happen. Either the children will bring delight to their parents or they will bring grief. Some children bring their godly parents delight because the training they have received results in the children using wisdom in making decisions and choosing to follow the Lord. Their parents experience a sense of pride when watching their children make wise and well-informed decisions, when their children grow spiritually and accomplish work in the kingdom of God, and when their children pass along their wisdom to their own children. Proverbs 10:1 says, “The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.” Proverbs 29:17 says, “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul.”

Yet, some children bring their godly parents grief and sorrow because they continue to make foolish decisions that harm themselves, harm others, and fail to please God. Their parents always seem to have to make excuses for their children’s actions, take the blame for what their children have done, or privately weep and worry when considering what they have done wrong in raising their children. Proverbs 17:25 says, “A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him.” Proverbs 19:13 says, “A foolish son is the ruin of his father, And the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.”

Although every child does possess free will and can make his/her own choices in life, there is much in whether a child brings delight or grief that is the result of the training received. For, the wisdom (or lack thereof) parents have used in raising their children will be on display for everyone to see whenever the children have grown. Jesus said, “But wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). While Jesus was not speaking specifically about parents and children, I believe the principle is applicable. The results/fruit of what we do go a long way to demonstrate the wisdom (or lack thereof) that was used.

In the way he should go

All parents are training their children in *some* way. Even parents who neglect and abuse their

children are training them. They just are not training them in a way that will be beneficial for their children. And, given the responsibility of children to learn from their parents, there are great consequences to this foolishness in training.

Since all training is not equally valuable and helpful to children, this implies that there must be time and effort shown in order to train in the right way. Remember that Proverbs 22:6 says to train up a child “in the way he should go.” That does not happen by accident. That does not happen by parents getting so caught up in the busyness of life, in working overtime to give their children everything they want, in running to and from ballgames, choir, concerts, etc., in leaving their children in the care of another while they work or spend time with friends, in letting the television, video games, the internet, social media, etc. occupy their children’s time, etc. Instead, training children in the way they should go is a very proactive responsibility that requires parents sacrifice in order to provide such training.

Think about what parents may need to sacrifice in order to train their children in the way they should go. Maybe they need to live in a smaller and cheaper house with less expensive vehicles and fewer toys so that mom does not “have” to work outside of the home and so that dad can actually be home with and lead his family properly. Maybe parents and children all need to turn off the television, phones, video games, computers, and other electronic devices so that they can focus on strengthening relationships and studying God’s word together. Maybe parents will not be able to keep up the kind of social lives that they may have had in high school, college, or in their pre-children days in order to be around their children rather than their friends. Maybe parents will have to limit the number of activities their children are involved in so that their training time is not spent in so much chaos running to and from all of the different activities and they can spend time as a family doing what really matters (i.e. serving God, studying the Bible, attending the assemblies of the local church, etc.). Maybe parents will have to sacrifice worldly standards of success for their children (i.e. having the best athlete, the best student, the president of the student body, most popular in the class, etc.) in order to focus on God’s

standards of success for their children. While these are just a few examples, parents will surely need to make sacrifices in order to complete the appropriate training.

Then, parents must recognize that the way their children should go involves both physical and spiritual components. Consider some physical elements to the training parents must provide for their children. They should teach their children personal hygiene (i.e. how to wash their hands, how to brush their teeth, how to bathe, how to dress themselves, etc.). They must teach their children to obey them (i.e. especially when they instruct their children to do things that their children don't want to do). They should teach their children regarding the secular knowledge they will need (i.e. the alphabet, mathematical skills, etc.). They must teach their children that decisions have consequences (and let them experience the consequences of their decisions). They must teach their children respect for authority (i.e. respect for their parents, teachers, law enforcement officers, elders, etc.). They must teach their children how to manage their resources well (i.e. their time and money). They must teach their children how to work (rather than having everything given to them). This is just a sample of some physical things that parents should be training their children in.

But, even more important than the physical training is the spiritual training that parents must provide for their children. This spiritual training includes such things as believing that God exists and is the Creator of all things, believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, trusting in the Bible as the inspired word of God that will judge us all, living according to the standard of right and wrong God has revealed in the pages of the Bible, loving God with all their lives, the dangers of sin, the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, the church that Jesus Christ has established, how to establish Bible authority, how to live holy and pure lives in Christ Jesus, how to serve others, the importance of teaching the gospel of Christ to the lost, denying self of physical pleasures and treasures whenever they are contrary to God's will, how to be good stewards, how to answer objections to the faith revealed in the Bible, what God requires of all the members of the home, how to

choose godly friends, how to endure the trials of life, etc.

Following the Bible in training your children will cause success for both yourself and your children. Joshua 1:8 records Joshua speaking to the Israelites about following the Law of Moses that had been given by God. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Unfortunately, there are many parents who train their children in physical ways that are beneficial to their children, but neglect the spiritual training that is so crucial. Remember, parents are partly responsible for their child's spiritual life that will continue through eternity. Surely, they should want nothing more for their child than to train him/her in a way that will result in eternal life in Heaven!

Listen to Deuteronomy 6:4-9. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

This spiritual training should be interwoven in every area of life. There should be regular spiritual conversation at the dinner table, as you travel in the vehicle, as you walk together, as you see opportunities for lessons in faith and living for God, etc. There should be constant reminders of God's laws in the home. God's law should always be given the important place that it deserves in the home – in study, in discussion, in application, etc.

This is so crucial to the spiritual wellbeing of children (even the very young) because "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). We should never expect our

children to develop true saving faith that will cause them to *choose* to obey God if we do not teach them the word of God that develops that kind of faith while they are young. This kind of training is more valuable than all of the physical training that enables them to be good students, get good jobs, be good athletes, etc.!

God's blueprint (ideally) involves both father and mother working to train their children in these spiritual ways. Fathers, remember, are commanded: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). And, recall that Timothy's mother passed her faith on to him by teaching him the Scriptures from childhood (2 Timothy 1:5 and 2 Timothy 3:15).

When he is old he will not depart from it

Now, here is the hope of all the training that is done while the children are at home. Proverbs 22:6 says to train up a child in the way he should go and "when he is old he will not depart from it." We must recognize the great encouragement that is being offered to Christian parents in this verse, while we also exercise care not to make conclusions that are not supported by the text.

We must remember that the book of Proverbs reveals wisdom from God. But, there are many generalizations that are made in the book that do have exceptions. This Proverb is no different. So, as you consider the general truth, you should recognize that parents who do their job right in training their children will often see their children grow up and decide to follow that same path in life and pass it on to their children later.

In fact, this can even be seen with parents who were *not* Christians. There are many similarities that can be observed between parents and children. Children will often follow in their parents' footsteps (knowingly or unknowingly) because it is what is most familiar to them. Parents who are involved with alcohol, drugs, promiscuous sex, etc. often see their children do the same. Parents who don't work hard often raise lazy children. Parents who don't handle money God's ways often have children who don't handle money God's ways.

The reverse is also often true. Parents who are diligent in taking their children to church services often see their children take their children to church services. Parents who have a God-structured home with high morals often see their children pursue God-structured homes and live according to those same standards of morality identified in the Bible. Parents who work hard and serve other people often see their children work hard and serve others.

So, training makes a difference and has a lasting impact on children. But, there *are* exceptions and parents need to recognize that even though they do their jobs their children still possess free will and may choose not to follow their parents' training. For instance, Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

I mentioned that the Proverbs contain many generalizations that do have exceptions. Consider an example (though many could be provided). Proverbs 10:27 says, "The fear of the Lord prolongs days, But the years of the wicked will be shortened." This is often true. Living according to God's ways often results in longevity of life compared to those who live wickedly. But, this is not a guarantee. Instead, there are many righteous people who die young (think about Jesus and Stephen) and wicked people who live long lives.

Then, if Proverbs 22:6 was a guarantee, what could be said about children who were *not* trained in the ways of the Lord? Would they be destined to follow their parents' sinful ways with no choice in the matter? Of course not! King Hezekiah is an interesting study to see both points (read 2 Kings 16-21). Hezekiah did what was right in the sight of God. Yet, both his father (King Ahaz) and his son (King Manasseh) did not.

Furthermore, consider God as the perfect example of a Father. He leads all of His children in the right ways all of the time, through His perfect example, perfect teaching, and perfect discipline. Yet, even He has prodigal children who choose not to listen to Him (see Luke 15:11-32). So, while

parents should absolutely strive to train their children in the ways their children ought to go and take comfort in the fact that this training often results in children who follow it when they are older, there are exceptions. Therefore, parents must be committed to simply doing the best job they can to train their children in the way they should go and pray that they will not depart from it when they are older.

Train Up A Child By Example

I believe that whenever we break down the concept of training our children, we find three elements. The first of these three elements is the example that is set by parents. You have likely heard it said that “actions speak louder than words.” All of the other training done by parents is of little value if their children *see* an example in their parents that contradict what their parents are *saying*.

“Like father, like son”

We can use our sense of observation and recognize that children are often similar to their parents, for the good or the bad. Even in “little things” (which often are not so little) like personal demeanor, people can recognize similarities between parents and children. The phrases, “like father, like son” and “like mother, like daughter” have been coined to express this reality.

Actually, this is a concept that is presented in the Scriptures. Ezekiel 16:44 says, “Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’” This can also be demonstrated throughout the Scriptures. For instance, while there are few exceptions (i.e. King Hezekiah), consider the examples of the kings of Israel and Judah. Example after example talks about how sons followed in the steps of their fathers. For instance, 2 Kings 15:9 speaks of Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, reigning over Israel. This king “did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done; and he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.”

Parents shepherd their children

Parents must carefully consider the example they are setting for their children. They must recognize that their children are watching. Consider your demeanor, the way you talk, the decisions that you make, the morality you demonstrate, your priorities, your faith, etc. Your children are watching you – if only to try and catch you in a moment of hypocrisy! Don’t let them down by showing them an example that would not be pleasing to God!

You see, parents are like shepherds for their children. This is especially true about the father, but is true to a lesser degree for a mother. For instance, in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, concerning the qualifications for elders/shepherds in a local church, the apostle Paul said he must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).” So, fathers ought to shepherd their children.

Part of the work of shepherding involves leading the way for the sheep. Shepherds do not just command their sheep; they lead them (just as God leads us, see Psalm 23). This means that fathers (as well as mothers) need to lead their children by example in showing them the way their children ought to go. In fact, children often learn best by *seeing* rather than just being *told*. You have probably heard the phrase, “A picture is worth 1,000 words.” Just imagine, then, what an entire childhood of *seeing* strong examples of faithful living is worth to your children! But, in contrast, imagine what an entire childhood of *seeing* weak or inconsistent examples of godly living does to your children!

The “light” of parents must be strong

Children are often excellent at spotting hypocrisy. For, their foolishness wants some way to justify their desires. So, if mom and dad are not living consistently faithful lives, they should not be surprised to see their children use their failings to justify their own ungodly activity later! The fact is that Christian parents must be committed to letting their lights shine as bright as they can while they are in the home – not just while they are around their Christian brethren or out in the world!

Jesus taught the value of a godly example in Matthew 5:13-16. “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Peter taught the same thing concerning Christian wives toward their unbelieving husbands in 1 Peter 3:1-2. “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.”

Therefore, Christian parents must never allow their lights to go out in the home. Instead, they should live their lives in such a way that will cause their children to consider their faith and glorify God! Yes, Christian parents can win their children to the Lord (in large part) due to the example that is set. But, they can also drive their children away from the Lord by showing them an example of hypocrisy! And, Jesus warns that we must never cause a child to stumble. He said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Train Up A Child By Instruction

Here is a second component of training up your children. Training requires instruction. As good as your example may be, you will have to supplement your example with the proper instruction. Even Jesus (while setting the perfect example for everyone who saw Him) had to teach people how to live. So, parents must love their children enough to instruct them in

the proper ways – especially pertaining to the spiritual things of life.

Instruction takes knowledge

Parents must recognize that they cannot teach what they do not know. So, if you recognize the need to instruct your children in the ways of the Lord (as found in the pages of the Bible), you will never be able to do that effectively without first knowing what God’s word teaches. Recall from Deuteronomy 6, for instance, that before the Israelites could teach the laws of God diligently to their children, they were first instructed to “hear...and be careful to observe” them (verse 3). Then, verse 6 says, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.”

The same is true today. You must be diligently to study and understand God’s word before you are capable of passing on what you know. Unfortunately, many who are at this stage of their lives when they ought to be teachers still have need for others to teach them the basics of God’s word (Hebrews 5:12-14). Yet, if this is the case, make it a primary goal to go and get knowledge of God’s word by being diligent to study it every single day (Acts 17:11 and 2 Timothy 2:15)! Turn off the TV, put down the phone, shut off the computer, stop going out with your friends.... Do whatever you must do to get this knowledge so you can pass it on to your children. For, God has said that His people are destroyed “for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6)!

Instruction takes time

Children will not learn what you know about God and His word by just being around you (though they ought to learn some through your example). Instead, it will take your commitment to teaching them what they need to know. So, you should look for any and every opportunity to instruct your children in the way they should go.

Remember that Deuteronomy 6 speaks of teaching your children when you “sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (verse 7). So, just having a nightly or weekly Bible study ***is not enough!*** This must be a constant commitment to taking whatever opportunities you have to instruct in the ways of the

Lord! Paul spoke of “redeeming the time” regarding people who needed to learn the gospel (Colossians 4:5-6).

Instruction takes patience

It would be nice if the people we tried to teach would understand and obey what we teach them the first time, every time. But, it does not happen. And, it won't happen with your children either. The fact is that helping people learn the truths in God's word is often a long process. Truths (even basic truths) will often need to be repeated over and over again!

Therefore, it is essential that you show patience in your teaching! Certainly, you do not want your children to feel as though they are incapable of learning God's word and that you are quick to abandon them in your instruction! The apostle Paul taught, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). Surely, this has some application in the home as well as outside of it!

Instruction takes wisdom

The way that you teach the truth of the gospel matters. Jesus instructed His apostles, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). The apostle Paul said that the truth must be spoken “in love” (Ephesians 4:15). He also said, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:5-6).

You should pray for wisdom (James 1:5), as applicable to teaching your children. You will need wisdom from God in knowing what you need to teach to your children and when you should teach it. You will need wisdom to know how much to push and at what times. You will need wisdom in relating Bible truths to the lives of your children and making the appropriate applications.

Train Up A Child By Discipline

A third element of training is discipline. Now, I have arranged these three in the order that I believe to be the most appropriate and effective. A godly example is necessary in order for instruction to be the most effective. And, instruction is necessary before discipline should be taken. And, discipline is essential to correct the improper behavior of our children.

No discipline is a failure

Perhaps you have either said or heard parents say, “I love my children too much to spank them” (or discipline them in some other way). Yet, God says that if you do not properly discipline your children (which includes spanking), you hate your children! In fact, it has been said that the worst form of child abuse happens when parents do not discipline their children appropriately. And, there is a lot of truth in that statement.

Listen to the vast array of Scriptures that speak on this subject. Proverbs 13:24 says, “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” Proverbs 19:18 says, “Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction.” Proverbs 22:15 says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Proverbs 23:13-14 says, “Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell.” Proverbs 29:15 says, “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” Proverbs 29:17 says, “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul.” Study each of these passages carefully and diligently and do not be like Eli, who did not restrain his sons (1 Samuel 3:13)!

Too much discipline is a failure

While failing to exercise discipline is clearly not the way of wise parenting, too much discipline is also a failure. It is sad to see parents who abuse their own children through excessive discipline (or in any

way). Surely this leaves scars on the child that will not be easily repaired. Then, there are also parents who verbally abuse their children through yelling and screaming at them out of personal anger, speaking out of frustration, saying things that should never be said (and can never be taken back), and break the spirits of their children. Sometimes, the discipline that is used does not “fit the crime” that was committed and pushes their children away rather than accomplishing the good it was meant to accomplish.

Listen to Paul’s instructions to fathers in Ephesians and Colossians. Ephesians 6:4 says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Colossians 3:21 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” Therefore, God warns fathers (in particular) not to push their children so much that they push them into rebellion, break their spirits, and cause unnecessary irritation.

Proper balance must be achieved

Both of these extremes must be avoided whenever parents discipline their children. These can do great harm to their children physically, emotionally, and spiritually. So, parents must pray for and use wisdom regarding the proper way to discipline their children.

I believe that God is the perfect example of disciplining His children. Read Hebrews 12:3-11 about the way in which God’s chastens His children. Notice carefully that the purpose of the chastening is to yield “the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (verse 11). So, parents must recognize that discipline is not a way to get out your own frustrations or disappointments. Instead, it is a way to show your children love and help them live better in the future by correcting the mistakes that have been made.

But, like God, you must make sure that you truly understand all the facts and not execute judgment too hastily. You also must be willing to use the “rod” of correction. Yes, Christian parents should believe in spanking their children. Though it does not

have to be used in every situation, it ought to be used regularly as part of your children’s training.

Then, Christian parents must also recognize that God requires them to exercise discipline regarding their children who have grown, become Christians, and gone back into sin. Carefully read Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. In fact, this discipline is often most effective whenever it is carried out by parents and should work to pull the child back to Jesus Christ for the saving of his/her soul! Parents must not allow their physical relationships with their children to be more important than saving their souls from eternal torment!

Conclusion

Parents have a responsibility toward their children to train them in the way they should go. It is a great failure for a parent to help give his/her child physical and spiritual life and then not properly, carefully, and lovingly lead, instruct, and discipline that child! Although the job of parenting has many difficulties and is a great responsibility, it is a most rewarding work when it is done according to God’s blueprint!

Study Questions

How is Satan trying to destroy the next generation by getting parents to fail in their responsibilities?

1. Train Up A Child

Why must children be trained?

In what way must parents train their children? Give some specific examples.

What will often be the result of this kind of training?
Is this a guarantee?

2. Train Up A Child By Example

How do children often follow the example of their parents?

How are parents like shepherds of their children (especially fathers)?

Explain how parents must let their lights shine for their children.

3. Train Up A Child By Instruction

Why does instruction take knowledge?

How does instruction take time?

How does instruction take patience?

How does instruction take wisdom?

4. Train Up A Child By Discipline

How is exercising no discipline a failure?

How is exercising too much discipline a failure?

How can proper balance be achieved?

Lesson 8:

God's Blueprint For Character In The Home

Up to this point in our study, we have established God's blueprint for each member of the home and some essentials to the home. But, God's blueprint for the home is not just found in passages that specifically address marriage, parenting, children, etc. Instead, God's blueprint for the home is found throughout the pages of the Scriptures.

For instance, to carry on the illustration of a blueprint, perhaps you could say that we have now laid the foundation of the home (love and marriage), and built the structure of the home by adding the walls and the roof (in the God-given roles of the home). Now, our homes are still not fully what God wants them to be. Just as physical homes still need to have the wiring, plumbing, and ductwork ran, the insulation added, the drywall installed and finished, etc., God wants all the members of the home to dive even deeper and live according to His blueprint in all areas of their lives.

One of these areas is regarding the character of each member of the home. For, even when all the members of the home follow God's blueprint concerning their roles, they can still fail to be what God wants them to be if the members of the home do not possess the kind of character God has outlined in the pages of His word. In fact, let me simply say, that

the only way homes will function at their greatest potential is when both parents are true disciples of Jesus Christ and are training all their children to also possess the character of Christ and follow Him.

Unfortunately, Satan destroys homes by convincing members of the home *not* to possess the character that is approved by God. So, he convinces people to act in selfish ways by seeking their own pleasures above the good of the other members of the family. This is true any time there is sin in the home. Fortunately, God has given us all the same blueprint to follow concerning the kind of character that we must possess.

God-Shaped Character

In order for homes to function properly, every member of the home must be committed to character that is shaped by God. He must be given the opportunity to make us into whatever He wants us to be. For, the problems that come up in the home *always* result from trying to be who *we* want to be rather than who *God* wants us to be!

He is the Potter, we are the clay

There is a fitting illustration in the book of Jeremiah for what God wants from us today. It is an illustration of a potter and clay. Listen to Jeremiah 18:1-10.

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have

spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.”

Just picture clay in the hand of a potter. The potter is the one who has full control. He is the one who decides what he wants to make the lump of clay into. The clay just willingly allows itself to be molded. This is what God wanted to do with His people in the Old Testament, but they refused. And, this is exactly what God wants to do with you and every member of the home today. Now, you must decide whether you will allow yourself to be molded by God into whatever shape He wants your life to take or whether you are going to resist Him as the Potter. For, God does not force Himself on anyone; but offers to mold everyone.

Shaped by God's word

Ultimately, the way God wants to shape everyone is through His word. This is the way God speaks to us today. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:16-17. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The words that are found in the pages of the Bible have been breathed out by God. And, they teach you every doctrine you should believe, tell you everything about your life you need to change, help you make those changes, and tell you every right thing you should be involved in. So, the word of God can make you perfect in Christ Jesus, fully equipped to do every good thing God wants from your life.

Therefore, if you will give yourself to be obedient to His word, your character will be exactly what He wants from you in the home (and in every area). First, His word will transform you from a sinner separated from Him to a disciple of Jesus Christ. So, all members of the home who have reached the age of accountability must begin by obeying God's plan of salvation. This plan involves

hearing God's word (Romans 10:17), believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24), repenting of sin (Acts 17:30-31), confessing Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and being baptized for the remission of sin (Acts 2:38). Baptism is the point at which an individual becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-4).

Then, members of the home must continue being shaped by God's word to eliminate sinful things from their lives and put on the righteousness that God instructs (as we'll further discuss later in our study). But, in order for this to happen, all members of the home must take an attitude of being “doers of the word” and “not hearers only.” For, if we are only hearers of God's word and do not practice the things God's word instructs, we can deceive ourselves (James 1:22). We do this by thinking that we are living by God's word (just because we know what His word teaches), when we are actually living contrary to His instructions.

Shaped by the life of Christ

One of the powerful things in the Scriptures that ought to shape our lives is the life that Jesus Christ lived on this earth. In all things, He lived as a man and was tempted in the same ways that every member of the home is tempted in. Yet, He did not commit any sin (Hebrews 4:15). So, the Scriptures encourage us to “follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). In fact, a true disciple of Christ is both a student of Jesus and an imitator of Jesus. Therefore, every member of the home would profit from a study of the life of Christ and observe the kind of character that He demonstrated.

For instance, Christ's character was one of a servant. His life was not about Himself and what He hoped to gain. Instead, it was a life of complete sacrifice in laying down His life (being crucified) so that we could have our sins forgiven. Listen to how Philippians 2:3-8 encourages us to serve others and look out for their best interests based on Christ's life as a servant.

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for

the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Surely, being a servant molded by the example of Jesus Christ will go a long way in the home. Rather than every member of the home acting with pride and selfishness, fighting and bickering to get what he/she wants, there will be an attitude of humility and charity. Just picture a home where husband and wife are committed to joyfully serving one another and looking out for what the other wants more than for selfish interests. Consider the example that this will set for the children. Imagine a home in which children are taught that it is not about what they want, but that they should serve people around them (including their brothers and sisters). This can all happen if every member allows himself/herself to be shaped by the life of Christ.

Service is just one example of how a home can be shaped by the life of Christ. Think also about Christ’s love. His compassion. His mercy. His patience. His self-control. His gentleness. All of these things will surely have a significant and lasting impact on the home – if every member of the home would simply be committed to allowing the life of Christ to shape their lives.

Shaped by God’s holiness

One of the characteristics of God that will define what He molds our character into is His holiness. God is a holy God (Revelation 4:8). 1 John 1:5 explains what that means. “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

There is no element of wickedness in who God is. He is completely separated from everything that is evil. So, if members of the home give themselves to be molded by God (as a potter molds the clay), God will make them holy. In fact, 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “but as He who called you is holy, you

also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

So, those who are molded by God’s word should recognize that everything it instructs of them is fully in compliance with God’s holiness. There is nothing that God’s word instructs, approves, or implies that would result in someone *not* being holy. Therefore, if the members of the home want to have a character that is approved by God, they *must* allow God’s word to be the final authority in all things.

Notice carefully that God’s instruction is for us to all be holy in “all” of our conduct. This includes the choices we make. This includes the work we do. This includes the way we dress ourselves. This includes how we talk to people. This includes the entertainment we engage in. This includes how we interact with other people. There is no area that is exempt from the standard of God’s holiness. Instead, every area of our lives must be molded by God’s standard for what is right and wrong!

Eliminating The Sin That Destroys

Part of having character shaped by God is to eliminate the sin that destroys. It is simply unacceptable for there to be sin that is permitted to remain in the home. For, not only does sin destroy the soul of the one who is living in it (Romans 6:23), but it will also work to destroy the home. Consider a couple passages that identify some lists of sin so that we can make application and eliminate them from our lives and have God-approved character.

Romans 1:28-32

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving,

unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

Here is quite a list of sinful activities. First, recognize that those who do such things do things that “are not fitting.” Second, consider that all of these things are contrary to acting in the ways of God. Third, those who do such things (as well as those who approve of people doing these things) are “deserving of death” (spiritual death). Then, while these consequences are bad enough, you must also recognize that every one of them will work to destroy the home. So, let’s consider some things that are specifically identified in this text and how they will destroy the home.

(1) Unrighteousness, wickedness, evil-mindedness, inventors of evil things. Here are some general terms that can describe character that does not seek to follow God. Some are unjust/unfair in how they treat the members of the family. Some have set their hearts on devising wicked things and follow through with practicing many of those same wicked ways. And, sometimes, people also interpret the things that are done in the home in the worst possible way (i.e. believing that a member of the family has the worst motive possible).

(2) Covetousness, maliciousness, envy. Covetousness is a greedy desire for more. This is not only dangerous in the home when there is covetousness toward another family member, but also when members of the family covet what those outside of the family have. This robs the family of the contentment that is so important. Then, sometimes it happens that envy and maliciousness are present (many times because of covetousness). Envy is the displeasure toward another for the good that he/she experiences. Jealousy can digress to envy and to maliciousness because there is a desire to injure another person. How sad it is whenever the character of one member of the family has the malicious desire to injure another member of the family – in any way, for any reason!

(3) Deceit. The person who acts with deceptions is always being crafty and trying to manipulate a situation to gain the advantage or get what he/she

wants. So, this individual chooses not to act and speak with honesty and integrity at every point. This destroys trust in the home because the members of the family do not know what they can actually believe. But, deceit does not just happen through lies. Instead, even the truth can be manipulated to mislead people (think about what Satan did when he tempted Jesus with Scripture in Matthew 4:5-7).

(4) Strife, violent, murder. Far too many homes have an environment of constant fussing and arguing in which there is strife between family members. And, if this is a normal way of life in your home, you should recognize that there is sin in the home and someone (or multiple people) does not possess God-shaped character! Instead, there should be peace in the home. Then, the strife and anger that many people show in the home is far out of control if it ever reaches the point of violence and murder! So, let’s stop this sinful character before it ever reaches these points and deal with it while it is *only* fussing and arguing.

(5) Whisperers, backbiters. Both of these terms have to do with slander and gossip. How often do members of a family talk about the others behind their backs? It happens with regularity! One very common way this happens is for a husband or wife to go to his/her parents to talk about the failings of the spouse. This creates a situation where spouses do not trust each other out of fear that they will be gossiped and lied about. But, the same thing could be true when family members gossip and lie about the others to friends and brothers/sisters in Christ. Now, while it is entirely appropriate to seek wise counsel, help, and encouragement, the character of gossip and slander have no place in the home. These are often focused on making the other person look bad and/or making yourself look good. Trust is a very important thing in any home and must not be broken!

(6) Haters of God. A hater of God is the opposite of someone who loves God. So, since loving God involves keeping His commandments and not allowing His commandments to be burdensome (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3), a hater of God does not keep all of God’s commandments and does view God’s commands as burdensome.

(7) Proud, boasters. Pride goes before destruction, according to Proverbs 16:18. So, whenever members of the family elevate themselves (i.e. their own abilities, their own worth, their own opinions, their own traditions, their own judgments, etc.) above the other members of the family, there is danger on the horizon! This is going to result in greater strife and problems in the future. So, rather than boasting about self, members of the family need to learn humility and elevate the others.

(8) Disobedient to parents. Earlier in this series, we discussed the responsibility children have to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1). Yet, there are many children who possess such disrespect for their parents that they rebel against their instructions. This results in constant conflict between parents and children because rather than every member of the home working together and pulling in the same direction God has given, the child has decided he/she knows better than the parents and has his/her heart set on personal pleasures.

(9) Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. The prefix “un” implies that there is a lack of or the opposite of something. So, someone who is undiscerning is not making the right decisions that would please God. The one who is untrustworthy does not keep his/her word (i.e. a covenant breaker). The one who is unloving fails to show the right kind of love to his/her family. The unforgiving cannot be in an agreement with another. And, the unmerciful does not show the proper compassion, kindness, and forgiveness toward another. All of these characteristics destroy the home!

Galatians 5:19-21

There are some additional characteristics that destroy homes identified in Galatians 5:19-21. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Once again, you should notice that there are serious consequences for practicing any of the things identified in this passage. For, the passage says that those who “practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” But, again, the danger is not just spiritual. Instead, all these characteristics also destroy the home. And, notice that the destructive characteristics are not just limited to the things specifically identified in this passage. Instead, Paul concludes the list by stating “and the like.” So, all similar characteristics that are not approved by God are also condemned by that phrase. Note that we have already discussed some of the things mentioned in this passage, so we will not repeat them here.

(1) Adultery, fornication, lewdness. All these involve sins of a sexual nature. Earlier in this series, we discussed the truth that all sexual desires must be fulfilled between husband and wife in a God-approved marriage. So, the character of a husband or wife who is not completely faithful to the other spouse is going to cause major trouble in a home. This not only applies to having sexual relationships, but even to impure thoughts about others (as lewdness involves). Unfaithfulness in these areas will destroy trust, violate the marriage covenant, and destroy the stability of the home that the children depend on. They are entirely based on selfishness and are not at all considerate of the other members of the family.

(2) Idolatry, sorcery. Both words discuss false religion. Idolatry involves the worship and service of a false god. This could be a statue god or this could be something like money, earthly pleasures, family, jobs, etc. Anything that makes God accept less than He truly deserves is an idol and is not acceptable. Then, sorcery distorts reality and many people choose to put their trust in those things. This could involve “magical” arts (i.e. fortune tellers, palm readers, etc.) and it could also involve drugs that distort the reality for people. So, these things convince people to accept things that are not true and they serve those things instead of God. All manner of false religion will work to destroy the home because it will not help the home build on the one blueprint that will result in success (which is God’s blueprint).

(3) Outbursts of wrath. Angry passion is an all-too-common sight in homes. Rather than

members of the home practicing patience and love, members of the home are quick to respond emotionally. This results in speaking a harmful word that cannot be taken back and acting rashly in a way that leaves irreparable harm. Some get angry and are quick to leave the home rather than working through difficulties. Some husbands and wives get so angry with one another that they become physically violent toward the others. Some members of the family even become abusive toward the entire family (physically, emotionally, spiritually, sexually).

(4) Selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies.

The selfish character that many possess in the home leads to many kinds of problems. Rather than pursuing what is best for other members of the family, these always look out for whatever he/she desires. One of the problems this causes in the home is division. So, one member of the family puts himself/herself forward in a way that will be divisive and works to separate the family. For instance, a father or mother could force a child to pick sides in an argument. Now, rather than the entire family working according to God's blueprint to move forward together, this divisive character has fragmented the family.

(5) Drunkenness, revelries. Drunkenness means intoxication. Revelries refer to a half-drunken condition and noisy partying. You should also note that 1 Peter 4:3-4 even condemns any kind of social drinking of intoxicating beverages. Such intoxicating beverages have done an untold amount of damage in homes. The use of these intoxicating drinks always compounds the problems that exist in the home. Instead of choosing impairment, our character must be one of choosing to be in full control of our mental states at all times.

Being Clothed With Righteousness

Surely these are just a sampling of the kind of character that must be eliminated from our lives. But, eliminating this kind of sinful character that destroys our homes is only one half of the battle. The other

necessary part is to be clothed with the kind of righteous character God approves. So, consider a few passages that demonstrate the kind of character we all must put on to be pleasing to God.

Galatians 5:22-24

In contrast with the works of the flesh that will cause us to miss out on Heaven is the fruit of the Spirit identified in Galatians 5:22-24. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

(1) Love, joy, peace. Perhaps we could say that these three are foundational for a character that is pleasing to God. All the members of a home must love every other member – as well as God and everyone else they come into contact with (as discussed in lesson 2). This is a selfless and sacrificial kind of love that always seeks what is in the best interest of the others. Then, the joy that every member of the family ought to have is not a mere happiness about some earthly situation. Instead, it is a true gladness that comes from serving the Lord (even though earthly situations may be unpleasant). So, Christian homes ought to be joyful – even when there are great challenges facing it. Then, there should be peaceful harmony in every direction in the home that is built according to God's blueprint. Every member of the home should be at peace with God, with himself/herself, and live peaceably with all others as much as is possible (Romans 12:18).

(2) Longsuffering, kindness, goodness. All the members of the home should have the kind of character that endures the difficulties and trials of life (even in family life). Rather than becoming easily frustrated and quitting, there must be a commitment to working out and working through problems that come up. Then, every member of the home must have the characteristic of kindness. The words spoken and actions taken must show the proper consideration for others. And, in all things, all the members of the home must have the character of goodness. That is, they all should work toward accomplishing what is good in the sight of God.

(3) Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Everyone in the home should be faithful (reliable, trustworthy). Not only should they all be able to trust and count on each other, but they should all be trustworthy to live in the way God desires. Part of how family members will build trust is by being gentle and self-disciplined. Gentleness is strength under control. So, it does not misuse strength for selfish purposes or in harmful ways. Instead, it properly harnesses strength to accomplish what is best for others. And, the characteristic of self-control is essential to any kind of God-approved living. Self-control results in being the master of all the earthly passions that bring about sin and destruction to the home. Instead of being a slave to these desires, the one who has self-control is able to only make decisions that are right for the home.

Ephesians 4:17-5:21

This is too extensive of a passage to quote here. But, I would strongly encourage you to read the text for yourself. In fact, this one passage makes many points that are pertinent to our study that I will summarize. Study it carefully and reflect over how it applies to your life.

(1) Put off the old, put on the new.

Ephesians 4:17-32 speaks of a great transformation that should take place in every member of the home who reaches the age of accountability. Although we have all sinned in the past and demonstrated a character that was contrary to the will of God, we must put on a new kind of character that is patterned after God's righteousness and holiness. So, putting away lying, we should speak truth. We should not be angry and sin. We should put away stealing and work with our hands and give. We should be transformed in our speech. We should be kind, tenderhearted, and forgive others (just as God forgives us).

(2) Be imitators of God as dear children.

Not only in forgiveness, but in all things, we should be imitators of God. We should walk in love, just as Christ has loved us. So, we should put away every form of evil in our lives and not be a partaker of it (Ephesians 5:1-7). If God would not live in the ways that we are living, there is something wrong and we must change our lives/character immediately!

(3) Walk in light. Ephesians 5:8-14 describes how we must not live our lives in the evil that once described how we lived. Instead, we now must be transformed to live in the light of the Lord and walk as children of light. In everything that we do, we should be focused on what is acceptable to the Lord and not have any participation with the unfruitful works of darkness. Instead, we should have the kind of character that exposes everything that is sinful.

(4) Walk carefully. Those who want to please God must be very careful in how they live their lives. This is certainly true in the home. Every member of the home must consider that there are many temptations and traps that are trying to destroy them. So, we must all seek to understand and apply the will of the Lord.

Matthew 5-7

Finally, Jesus' teaching during the "Sermon on the Mount" provides transformational instructions for your character. And, if every member of the home will apply these instructions to their lives, it will go a long way to having better homes. Again, this is an extensive reading, so please read, study, and apply it on your own. Consider the following brief points from the text.

(1) The Beatitudes. In Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus demonstrates how a character that pleases God and results in happiness does not look the same as the character the world values. He speaks of the characteristics of being "poor in spirit" (humble), "those who mourn" (over their sin), "the meek" (gentle, as discussed earlier), "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," "the merciful," "the pure in heart," "the peacemakers," and "those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

(2) Be a good example. In Matthew 5:13-16, God wants your character to provide a stark contrast to the sinful ways and characteristics shown by those who are of the world. He does not want you just to be play-acting the part of a Christian. Instead, He wants you to be sincere in serving the Lord. If you do, you will point people to Jesus Christ and help them glorify the Father.

(3) Purity in heart. Throughout Jesus' sermon, He contrasts the commonly held beliefs with His new law (see Matthew 5:17-48). And, one thing that should be apparent is that God cares about your heart. He does not want your righteous character to be empty. Instead, He wants your righteous character to flow from a pure heart. So, it is not enough just *not* to murder. Instead, God wants you to seek reconciliation with those who have something against you. It is not enough just *not* to commit adultery. Instead, God wants you to refuse to lust after another and be completely faithful to your spouse. And, rather than hating your enemies, God wants you to love them.

(4) Sincere motives. Even in appearing to serve God, Jesus demands that you be sincere (Matthew 6:1-18). So, you must not just do good works to be seen and praised by men. Instead, you must do them for the sake of God and not to be praised by men. The same thing goes for when you pray and when you fast. Don't have the kind of character that seeks to be seen of men and praised by the same. Instead, have the kind of character that is seeking to please God and find your reward from Him!

(5) Focus on God. In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus wants you to put your focus on seeking God and Heavenly treasures above all things that pertain to this world. So, your character should be one of faith and faithfulness in serving the Lord. Nothing and no one must be allowed to come before Him.

(6) The "Golden Rule." Matthew 7:12 contains a single and simple commandment that, if applied to the character of every member of the home, would quickly transform our homes. Jesus said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." So, your character must be such that you consider how you would want the other members of the family to treat you and adjust how you treat them accordingly!

Conclusion

There is certainly much that we could discuss relative to the kind of character that is needed in the home. It is the same kind of character that God requires of every Christian. So, let us all diligently search the Scriptures and allow God to shape our character into exactly what He wants it to be. Allow Him to identify and help you eliminate all of the sinful character that destroys homes. And, allow Him to identify and help you be clothed with all of the righteous character that will help homes be as strong as they can be!

Study Questions

How does Satan destroy homes by attacking the character of each member?

1. God-Shaped Character

What illustration is used in Jeremiah 18? How is this a fitting illustration of what God wants from you today?

How will God shape your character by His word?

How will God shape your character by the life of Christ?

How will God shape your character by God's holiness?

2. Eliminating The Sin That Destroys

Explain the sin Romans 1:28-32 identifies and how it negatively impacts the family.

Explain the sin Galatians 5:19-21 identifies and how it negatively impacts the family.

3. Being Clothed With Righteousness

Explain the righteousness Galatians 5:22-24 identifies and how it positively impacts the family.

Explain the righteousness Ephesians 4:17-5:21 identifies and how it positively impacts the family.

Explain the righteousness Matthew 5-7 identifies and how it positively impacts the family.

Lesson 9: God's Blueprint For Communication In The Home

Building on godly character in the home, every member of the home must strive for the kind of communication that would glorify God. For, a failure to communicate properly is one of the quickest ways for homes to be torn down and walls to be built to isolate members of the family. So, we should thoroughly consider what God's word teaches us concerning our communication.

The power of communication in the home is great. It has the potential to lift up all the members of the home and help everyone become what God would have them to be. Or, it has the potential to crush the spirits of everyone and hinder them from serving God. And, so that you don't think that communication is an either-or kind of proposal, our communication can also accomplish both (at different times, to different people).

The breakdown of many homes is accomplished through a failure to communicate according to God's blueprint. There is a great majority of people in homes who do not communicate effectively because they do not apply

God's standard. Not only does this failure to communicate apply to the words that are said, but also to how words are received.

So, Satan tries to interfere anywhere he can in the process of communication. This can be accomplished by interfering with the messenger, the receiver, or the message. Sometimes he can negatively impact all three at the same time. Whenever we allow Satan anywhere near our communication, it is sure to result in trouble for the home! Fortunately, God has given us all the same blueprint to follow concerning the kind of communication that we should be involved with in the home.

Keys To Effective Communication

There are three basic parts to any kind of communication. In fact, these are necessary ingredients of communication. There can be no communication without all three. First, there must be a messenger (someone sending a message). Second, there must be a receiver (someone receiving a message). Third, there must be a message (something sent from the messenger to the receiver). But, *effective* communication also demands holiness in all parts of the communication. To be "holy" is to be separated from everything that is evil and totally committed to following God's righteous ways. Remember that God has commanded us, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). This certainly applies to every element of our communication.

A holy messenger

First, effective communication requires a holy messenger. This is someone who is committed to only sending messages that have God's approval. This individual must recognize that, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). There will be "fruit" of every message that you send in the home.

Either it will be the “fruit” of death (or, tearing down) in the family or it will be the “fruit” of life (or, building up) in the family. You must recognize that whenever you choose to send any message, you are working toward one of these two goals. So, effective communication requires that you *always* choose to send messages that provide life to the family!

Proverbs 13:3 says, “He who guards his mouth preserves life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.” Because of the serious nature of every message that you send in the home, you should set a guard at your mouth. Just speaking according to what is on your mind or what you are feeling at a given moment can result in destruction that cannot be easily undone. So, you should set a guard at your mouth that will only allow messages that are helpful and that build up the receiver(s) to exit! So, Proverbs 10:20-21 says, “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of wisdom.”

Here is another benefit of the messenger guarding his/her mouth closely. Proverbs 21:23 says, “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.” Not only does your communication have an impact on others, but it also has an impact on yourself. You are going to have to eat the “fruit” of your own message (in one way or another). Maybe your message invites an argument. Maybe your message invites a “cold shoulder.” Maybe your message isolates you from others. So, carefully guarding your mouth and controlling the messages that you send will save you from a lot of trouble that you could otherwise bring on yourself.

Then, holy messengers are even careful in using their knowledge. Proverbs 15:2 says, “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pour forth foolishness.” Just because something is true doesn’t mean that you must say it. And, whenever it is time to speak something, you should still be careful how you say it. For, there are many people who injure and tear down others with the truth. So, the destruction is not caused by *what* is said, but *how* it is said! In all things, holy messengers need to consider the one who is receiving the message.

A holy receiver

Second, effective communication requires a holy receiver. This is someone who is committed to receiving the message in a way that has God’s approval. For instance, James 1:19-20 says, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” We’ll think about this passage from the perspective of the messenger a bit later. For now, let’s give it our consideration from the perspective of the receiver.

Here is a common problem in communication (especially in the home): Either all of the individuals involved in the communication are trying to talk at once (and over-talk each other) or the one who is supposed to be receiving the message is thinking about the next thing he/she wants to say rather than listening. In either case, the receiver has prevented the communication because he/she is not being “swift to hear.” Yes, those who are interested in following God’s pattern must be careful to hear what the messenger is actually saying. So, even though you may not agree with what is being said, you must try to understand the message in the way that the messenger is sending it!

Similarly, Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.” Sometimes we can be guilty of not really listening to what is being said because we have already made assumptions about the message. It may be that we have already decided there is nothing we have done wrong. It may be that we have already judged what is best. It may be that we have already determined that the messenger is only interested in attacking our character. It may be many things. Yet, if we already answer the message before we truly receive it, we will never receive it in the way God wants us to receive it.

Consider Proverbs 25:12. “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.” While messengers need to consider how they can be wise rebukers, I want to consider the “obedient ear.” Certainly, whenever both elements are combined, the result is always positive. But, regardless of the wisdom of the message that is being sent, we must do our part to

receive the message with an “obedient ear.” No, this does not imply that we must obey a message that is going to take us away from God. Instead, my point is simply that our intent in receiving the message should be honest and with the purpose of acting properly. We should not be guilty of shutting down communication before we have received the message in the appropriate way.

A holy message

Third, effective communication requires a holy message. This is a message that has God’s approval. Although we will be spending the remainder of this study giving greater consideration to what makes a message pleasing to God, I do want to consider some basic points now.

We should be aware that messages can take two forms. These are verbal and non-verbal (spoken and unspoken) messages. Although we will be focused on verbal (spoken) messages throughout this lesson, I believe that much (if not all) of what will be said also applies to the non-verbal (unspoken) messages we send. For, sometimes, there is as much or more communicated by our actions, posture, attitudes, and tone of voice than is communicated by our actual words. And, there are many times when the problems of communication are more about how something was said or received than the actual spoken message itself.

So, we need to apply God’s standards for communication to this as well. Not only does this apply whenever we are sending verbal messages (i.e. through our tone of voice, demeanor, etc.), but this also applies whenever we are supposed to be receiving verbal messages. For, rather than just listening carefully, those who are supposed to be receiving the message can actually be communicating (non-verbally) that they are not really listening, that they are not interested, that they have already judged about the matter, that they are angry, that they are irritated, etc. And, these non-verbal messages can prevent effective communication just as much as if there were two people screaming at each other!

Consider two verses. Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of

silver.” Proverbs 15:23 says, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”

Whether verbal or non-verbal, we must be committed to sending the right message at the right time. For, there is no right time for a wrong message. And, even a right message at the wrong time can hurt people. So, not only must the messenger evaluate himself/herself carefully, but the message (and the timing of that message) must also be very carefully considered.

Effective Communication And The Power Of The Tongue

As we begin to appreciate these three essential components to effective communication, let’s focus on the power of messages. Although we will be talking specifically about verbal messages, remember that many of these same points are applicable to non-verbal messages.

The difficulty of controlling the tongue

James chapter 3:1-12 provides us some great insight into the power of the tongue. Verses 1 and 2 teach about the difficulty involved in controlling the tongue. “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.”

Effective communication requires that we all be dedicated to controlling the messages we send. We all struggle to fight between the fleshly and spiritual natures that we possess. But, James helps us to see that one of the greatest struggles that we all have is to control our messages (our words). If we are successful in controlling our words to only speak words that are completely right with God, then we will likely be successful in other areas of our lives as well. For, controlling our words is among the most difficult tasks that any of us have to accomplish.

Small but powerful

James continues in verses 3 through 5 to demonstrate that even though the tongue is a small member of the body, it is very powerful. “Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”

Effective communication requires us to recognize that we must never underestimate the power of the tongue because of its physical size. So, James draws our attention to some other small things that have big impacts. Think about the small bit put into a horse’s mouth that is used to direct that large animal. Think about the small rudder that is used to direct large ships. And, think about how every large forest fire has begun with a small flame. The same is true about our words. We must recognize that there is a lot of potential that our messages have to destroy or to accomplish good!

Cannot trust the tongue

James continues in verses 6 through 8, then, to help us appreciate that we cannot leave the tongue to its own devices. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

Effective communication requires that we carefully guard our tongues. Just like forest fires that start with a small spark, many problems in the home and broken relationships can be traced back to a failure to control the tongue. James causes us to think about how all kinds of animals have been tamed (think about how trainers are even able to work in close proximity to lions while they are in zoos). Yet, the tongue cannot be tamed to this same degree. Now, I do not believe James is teaching us that we are doomed to fail in our communication and

providing us with an excuse for our failures. Instead, I believe he is telling us that our tongues cannot be tamed to the point that we can stop exercising constant watchful care over them! We must always have a guard set at our mouths and be prepared for our tongues to try and revert back to their destructive ways.

Blessing and cursing

James concludes his discussion about the tongue by warning us not to engage in both blessing and cursing with our tongues, in verses 9 through 12. “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”

Effective communication requires that we commit our tongues to only speaking messages that would be a blessing to others, not a curse. Think about how we can be guilty of speaking words of praise to God and then turn around and speak messages that curse those who have been made in the image of God (our fellow man). James says that these things “ought not to be so.” Just as a spring does not produce fresh water and bitter water from the same opening, a fig tree does not produce olives, and a grapevine does not produce figs, our tongues must not be allowed to produce messages of both blessing and cursing.

Judged for every word

Before we move on, I want to consider some quick points about our words from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 12:33-37. “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your

words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

First, appreciate how effective communication is connected with your character. So, you will not engage in effective communication if you do not have a heart that is focused on doing the will of God. Instead, all corrupt communication in the home comes from the heart that is not listening to God (at least not in all things). So, if you want to correct problems in your communication, you must begin with your heart and make sure that your heart is more focused on doing the will of God than it is focused on “winning” arguments, justifying yourself, etc.

Second, effective communication must recognize that you will give an account before God for every message (i.e. every word) that you send. And, notice carefully that this is even true for every “idle” word. So, even the messages that you send that are unemployed and useless will be judged. Therefore, whenever you are trying to send any kind of message, remember that God is also listening to the message and that message will be part of the judgment that announces whether you will spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell! Surely, this requires you to take a different perspective whenever you communicate.

Effective Communication Eliminates Destructive Messages

There are two things that are necessary regarding the messages that we send. The first is that we must eliminate all kinds of destructive messages from being sent. Now, we cannot control the messages other people in the home will send. But, we *can* control our own messages and determine that we will send no message to anyone that works to destroy in any capacity. Consider a sample of the kinds of destructive messages we must eliminate (though I am sure we could add to this list).

Corrupt words

A “corrupt” word is a word that is bad. It is not of a good quality. It does not accomplish good. It is rotten. So, God wants His people to eliminate such messages from being sent. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Now, this verse forbids a lot of language that is commonly used today. In fact, it even forbids all of the other categories we are going to consider in this section. So, we will avoid making those applications here so that we can discuss them in greater detail a bit later. One specific application, though, involves eliminating profanity, euphemistic expressions, using God’s name in vain, etc. This would also apply to gossip, slander, and such things. None of these corrupt messages have any part in the way people should communicate in the home (or even outside of it).

Ephesians 4:31 goes on to say, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” Again, notice the specific application of “evil speaking.” Any kind of word that is evil must not be part of the message you send. Then, as you consider the other items on this forbidden list, we can also make applications to the messages we send. For instance, our messages must not have any trace of bitterness, unrighteous anger, fighting, and hatred!

Finally, Ephesians 5:3-4 adds to the list of what can fall under the heading of “corrupt words.” “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” So, there must be nothing filthy/obscene about the way that you talk. There must be no foolishness (that goes against God’s wisdom) involved in the messages you send. And, there must be no inappropriate (“off-color” or suggestive) jokes made (“coarse jesting”). All of this is not fitting for God’s holy people (saints)!

Angry words

There may be no place where more angry words are spoken than in the home. Yet, we must be very careful how we deal with our anger. For instance, Ephesians 4:26-27 says, “‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” So, even when a situation arises that causes you to experience the emotion of anger, you must respond to it correctly so that it does not result in sin. One way that you can respond properly is to make sure that you do not speak out of anger.

Listen carefully to the following proverbs. Proverbs 15:18 says, “A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays [calms] contention.” Proverbs 21:19 says, “Better to dwell in the wilderness, Than with a contentious and angry woman.” Proverbs 29:22 says, “An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.” And, Proverbs 30:33 says, “For as the churning of milk produces butter, And wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife.”

While none of these passages specifically address angry *words*, they all apply to the messages we send. We must be very careful not to allow our messages to communicate any kind of anger in ways that God does not approve. For, all that our angry words accomplish is to cause more trouble. Instead, when we are slow to anger in our messages, we work to calm contentions. So, even though we may be tempted to respond in angry ways, we need to choose to send messages of calmness. For, James said, “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

Fighting words

Again, there may be no place where people are more prone to get into fights than with those in the home (i.e. between husbands and wives). However, we must recognize that one of the most harmful ways we can fight with anyone is by using our words as weapons. Yet, this is the case far too often toward those we love most on this earth.

Listen to some proverbs about contention (quarrelling, strife). First, consider a contentious woman. Proverbs 21:9 says, “Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” Proverbs 27:15-16 says, “A continual dripping on a very rainy day And a contentious woman are alike; Whoever restrains her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.” So, wives and daughters need to listen up. If they choose to act and speak in ways that promote strife and arguments, they will work to make their homes miserable. The other members of the home would be happier to live in a corner on the housetop than under the same roof with them! But, contentious men are no better! Proverbs 26:21 says, “As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.”

So, being contentious is condemned any way you look at it. God does not want people producing contention. Instead, God has said, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). Rather than speaking or acting in a way that stirs up fights and escalates them, you should be working to bring about peace. You see, the interesting thing about fights is that they take at least two people! Therefore, if you choose not to fight, then people in your home can’t fight with you. Instead, you will be contributing to peace.

Then, listen to a couple more proverbs on this point. Proverbs 18:6 says, “A fool’s lips enter into contention, And his mouth calls for blows.” Proverbs 17:14 says, “The beginning of strife is like releasing of water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.” Don’t be foolish and speak (or act) in ways that fight with others. Instead, recognize that starting (or contributing to) fights is like holes in a bucket to carry water. You can never get all the water back in and it is very difficult to accomplish your task. So, just as you should use a bucket with no holes, you should do everything you can to stop a fight before it begins!

Crushing words

One of the things I think people do not always do well is to put themselves in the place of the one who is receiving their communication. So, you need to try and listen to the message you send in the way

that the other person will receive it. This principle applies Jesus' "Golden Rule." He said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Yet, sometimes we crush people with our words because we do not apply this rule.

You need to recognize that your words have the ability to crush the people in your home. For instance, after Job had been hearing his friends falsely accuse him of doing wrong and bringing his suffering on himself, Job replied, "How long will you torment my soul, And break me in pieces with words?" (Job 19:2). So, rather than providing the comfort and encouragement that Job needed during this very difficult time in his life, his friends were adding to his suffering by breaking and crushing him with their accusative and judgmental words.

There are many ways that this same thing can manifest itself in the home. Yet, regardless of the specific applications, the words are used to break the spirits of others and tear them down rather than help and encourage them. Psalm 140:3 says, "They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; The poison of asps is under their lips." Surely, this must never be said about the way you communicate with others – especially those in the home! Your words must never be like poison or a weapon to harm others.

Effective Communication Harnesses Righteous Messages

The second thing necessary for an effective message is that we must harness the power of righteous messages. Again, we cannot control the messages other people will send in the home. But, we can choose to only send messages that will accomplish good. Consider a sample of the kinds of righteous messages we must be committed to sending (though I am sure we could add to this list).

Edifying words

Rather than allowing the messages you send to others to destroy and tear people down, you must commit yourself to *only* speaking words that build people up and help them be who God wants them to be (edify them). Look at Ephesians 4:29 again. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

Now, understand that speaking words of edification does *not* mean that the people who receive the message will always feel good about what you have said. But, every word that you say must be for the purpose of building people up spiritually and helping them get closer to God. Sometimes, this requires telling people truths that they will not like to hear. Still, it must be done with love and in a way that shows the grace of God to others. For instance, Ephesians 4:15 references the need to speak the truth "in love."

Furthermore, Colossians 4:6 (in the context of dealing with those who are not Christians) says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." So, in speaking words that build people up (even when they may not be what others would like to hear), you must always speak in a way that is palatable to others. Remember, Proverbs 25:12 spoke of a "wise rebuker to an obedient ear." So, you must use wisdom, grace, and love in your speech and make sure that every word you say accomplishes spiritual good rather than harm!

True words

There must be no place in your communication for words that are not 100% true or that mislead people in any way. This includes lying, which involves saying things that are false. This includes deceit, which involves misleading people (even though what you say might be true, you apply it in a way that misleads; compare with Satan's temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:5-7). This includes flattery, which involves not speaking the truth in order to keep from hurting the feelings of others. And, this involves not keeping the promises that you make.

For instance, Ephesians 4:25 says, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.” Lying is part of the old man of sin that must be put to death. In its place must be a new man who is committed to speaking truth. You see, homes must be built with trust. And, the only way you can have complete trust in the home is for there to be complete honesty and transparency.

Then, listen to what Jesus said about what the nature of our words ought to be in Matthew 5:37. “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” So, your words should not need any greater degree of emphasis added to them (i.e. swearing by something greater). Instead, you should allow your words to mean exactly what they say.

Calm words

We have already discussed how we must not be contentious in our communication. Now, we need to focus on the side of calmness. Recall that Proverbs 15:18 says, “A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.” So, you should be interested in calming any contention that exists and preventing future points of contention.

Listen to Proverbs 15:1. “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.” Think about the “communication” that often happens in marriage. One person speaks something the other does not respond appropriately to. So, he/she speaks with frustration and irritation. Then, the other responds back in a slightly more irritated and angry tone. Then, the other responds a little louder and more contentious yet. From there, it just continues in a downward spiral that does not result in anything that is good.

Instead of falling into this trap by speaking harsh words, you must work hard to answer softly. Use calmness and sincerity in your speech (even when it is difficult to do so). And, as we have already discussed, determine that every word you say will accomplish spiritual good.

Carefully chosen words

Remember the principles about the power of our words that we saw in James 3:1-12. Our tongues cannot be left unguarded and be trusted on their own. Every word that we say must be carefully considered and evaluated.

Now, all of this should help us to consider the number of words we speak. For, if it is difficult to control a single word and make sure it only accomplishes good, then, certainly, the more words we say, the more difficult it is to make sure our words do no harm and only accomplish good. For instance, Proverbs 10:19 says, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”

So, like James wrote, you must be “slow to speak” (James 1:19) – even in the home. Being slow to speak will give you plenty of opportunity to think *before* you talk! In doing so, you can have no regrets about what you have said and how you have said it. Proverbs 15:23 says, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”

Conclusion

There are many additional things we could discuss relative to how we should communicate. So, I encourage you to search the Scriptures even more thoroughly to discover all that is in God’s blueprint for your communication. I believe that by applying the things we have discussed in this lesson to your communication, you will be able to be effective and holy in your communication with everyone in the home!

Study Questions

How does Satan destroy homes through the way people communicate?

1. Keys To Effective Communication

What is the need for a holy messenger to effective communication?

What is the need for a holy receiver to effective communication?

What is the need for a holy message to effective communication?

2. Effective Communication And The Power Of The Tongue

What is the difficulty involved in controlling the tongue?

What is the powerful nature of the tongue relative to its size?

Why can you not trust the tongue?

Why do you need to prevent your tongue from engaging in blessing and cursing?

Where do your words come from and why are your words so important?

3. Effective Communication Eliminates Destructive Messages

What are corrupt words and why should they be eliminated?

What are angry words and why should they be eliminated?

What are fighting words and why should they be eliminated?

What are crushing words and why should they be eliminated?

4. Effective Communication Harnesses Righteous Messages

What are edifying words and why should they be used?

What are true words and why should they be used?

What are calm words and why should they be used?

What are carefully chosen words and why should they be used?

Lesson 10: God's Blueprint For Money In The Home

One of the things that makes the home so unique is that people don't just share the relationships of a home, but they also share physical resources. So, they share an income and they share what is provided by that income, along with the bills that must be paid. Now, when everyone is interested in building according to God's blueprint, this is a wonderful thing that benefits everyone involved. But, when someone (or multiple people) is not interested in following God's blueprint, this can be a burdensome thing.

It should not surprise anyone, then, to be told that money and money trouble is cited as one of the leading causes for divorce (and, perhaps, the single leading cause for divorce). Yes, Satan has used this area to destroy the home as effectively as he has used any area. He wants to get husband and wife fighting about money and bills. He wants people not to be united in how they should handle money.

But, God has a blueprint for money. If every member of the home would learn and apply His blueprint, the problems about how to view and handle money would be eliminated (although individuals still have to exercise their own judgments in making applications). Then, if every member of the home would be committed to doing his/her part

regarding the home's finances (and not act in selfish ways), the home could function peacefully in this area.

So, while Satan is trying to destroy the home through the way people view and handle money, God has a solution for it! But, rather than dividing over the issue of handling money, members of the home need to unite around God's blueprint and pursue God's goals for the family's finances. Then, parents who pursue God's blueprint for their family's finances should also be interested in training their children in God's ways of viewing and handling money. Therefore, you are encouraged to hand over all your family's finances to God and allow His blueprint to shape and control your approach to money.

A God-Shaped View Of Money

Before a family can establish and implement some simple (but powerful) priorities for their finances, they must first be united in viewing money God's way. For, Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life." So, what we think about things matters because our thoughts will impact our actions. Therefore, if we think about money God's way, we are more likely to handle money God's way. But, if we don't think about money God's way, we are more likely to handle money a different way. Let's consider, then, some ways God's blueprint teaches us to view money.

Money is a gift from God

I think it is important for a family to recognize that all their financial blessings come from God. Although we will talk about the need for us to work and provide for our families, this does not change the fact that God pours out every blessing. For instance, James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

Consider what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:25-34. He said that we must not worry, not even about the necessities of life on this earth (i.e. food, drink, and clothing). For, our lives are more than those things and God knows that we have need of them. So, just as God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field, God will take care of us. Therefore, rather than worrying and focusing on these things, we must “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (verse 33).

So, if we will seek God first in our lives, we should know that He will give us the things that we need. But, remember that these are gifts from God. And, remember that this promise is only concerning the physical necessities of life. This is *not* a promise that God will give you or your family all of the things that you might desire in life!

Still, God has blessed many people and homes beyond the physical necessities of life. 1 Timothy 6:17 says, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” So, it is not that God does not want us to have physical blessings (compare with 3 John 1:2). Instead, if you have these additional blessings, know God is the one who has given them to you.

And, God wants people to enjoy the physical blessings He provides. Notice the connection between identifying financial blessings as God’s gift, the result of work, and the place of enjoying those blessings in Ecclesiastes 5:18-19. “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.”

God requires diligent work

Now, some might conclude that since financial blessings are a gift from God, there is nothing that God wants us to do to earn money. Some believe that if they just sit back and do nothing that

God will bless them with what they need and they do not have to work. Yet, although God can choose to bless anyone (even those who are lazy), His blueprint teaches us the important connection between work and money.

From the time after Adam and Eve sinned, the connection between work and prosperity can be seen. For, Adam was told, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). This has not changed today. The apostle Paul taught that Christians must withdraw themselves from every brother who walks in a disorderly way and not according to the ways the apostle had delivered to them (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). The particular point under consideration in this text is how Paul did not just take a handout whenever he was among the Thessalonians. Instead, he labored night and day in order to provide an example for them (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). He said, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

As we discussed earlier in this series, this responsibility of working to provide financially for the family falls specifically on the shoulders of the husband and father. Remember that 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” And, remember that God has given wives and mothers the responsibility to be keepers of the home (Titus 2:4-5). So, while women can contribute to the family’s income, they must be careful not to fail in fulfilling their other God-given responsibilities. Furthermore, it is shameful for men to put their wives in situations that force them to be the primary provider of the home due to their own laziness and neglect!

Then, let me also add that the work that is done must also be honest work. Proverbs 13:11 says, “Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, But he who gathers by labor will increase.” Although some people look for “get rich quick” schemes, God

wants you to value good, old-fashioned, hard, and honest work! And, whenever you have agreed to do a job for a particular wage, you must be diligent in your work. Otherwise, you are guilty of stealing from your employer.

I believe there are some lessons that can be applied on this point from the slave-master relationship, as described in Colossians 3:22-25. Included in these instructions are that slaves must not just obey their masters “with eyeservice, as men pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God” (verse 22). So, they were not just to look busy when the “boss” was watching. But, to always do their jobs with diligence, as if they were laboring for the Lord (verses 23-24).

God requires faithful stewardship

One of the most transformational ways for your family to view money is from the perspective of stewardship. A “steward” is a manager of a household or household affairs. So, this individual watches over and manages things that do not belong to him. He does so in order to please the one who does own those things.

For instance, Jesus taught a parable about stewardship in Matthew 25:14-30. In it, He said that there was a man traveling to a far country. Before he went, he called three of his servants to himself and entrusted his possessions to their care, according to what he knew they could handle. So, he gave one servant five talents (note that a “talent” was a certain weight of gold or silver). Another servant was given two talents. And, a final servant was given one talent.

After the master left on his journey, the man with five talents went to work and gained an additional five talents. Similarly, the man with two talents gained two additional. But, the man with a single talent dug a hole and hid the talent in the ground. Then, when the master returned, he was pleased with and rewarded the men who had diligently worked and gained additional talents. But, he was not pleased with the man who had been entrusted with one talent, and delivered him to be punished.

Now, this parable has many applications about stewardship for us. Generally, it demonstrates

that we are managers of all the things God has blessed us with on this earth and we must put them to good use in His service. Then, one of the specific applications we must make from this is concerning our money.

As we have seen, the money that we have comes from God. And, while God wants us to enjoy the physical blessings of life (as we saw in Ecclesiastes 5:18-19), this does not mean that we should be selfish about our blessings. Instead, we must recognize that God is the one who owns our family’s money! So, He is the one who must have the primary consideration for how the money is used.

Here is a good example. In Acts 4, there were Christians in the church in Jerusalem who were in need of financial help. So, those Christians who had possessions sold their extra possessions in order to bring the proceeds to the apostles so they could distribute to those who had the need. They did this because they viewed themselves as stewards of what God had blessed them with. For instance, verse 32 says, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”

In the same way, families must learn to view themselves as stewards of the money and possessions God has blessed them with. So, it is not just theirs to do whatever they desire to do. Instead, they should consider the things to belong to God and be committed to using them to accomplish His purposes. Every dollar that comes into the home must not be viewed from a selfish perspective; but from the perspective of a steward of God’s blessings.

Godliness with contentment is great gain

A continual desire for more money and possessions can destroy a home as fast as anything else can. Listen to 1 Timothy 6:6-10. “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a

root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

There is an untold amount of damage that is done to homes that do not practice godliness with contentment (the state of being satisfied with what you already have been blessed with). Just think about how many marriages have suffered because both husband and wife are working long hours to “get ahead” or to support a standard of living that is higher than what is needed. Think about how many children have been brought up by baby sitters, daycares, and extended family members because a mother chose to work outside the home in order to pursue financial goals rather than running the home according to God’s blueprint. Think about the distance that Satan has been able to put between members of the family because of selfish pursuits of money.

Then, what makes this even worse is the fact that those who have such a worldly-minded focus in life will never find what they are searching for. They sacrifice what matters for what will only increase their emptiness in life. For, King Solomon (a man who experienced great wealth) said, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Instead of such a meaningless and harmful pursuit of earthly wealth, families who are interested in serving God must strive for contentment. They must not get caught up in the “rat race” of keeping up with the standards of the world. Instead, there is great gain in simply determining to live the kinds of lives that God desires us to live (including the fulfillment of family responsibilities) and to be satisfied with whatever God blesses us with!

It is more blessed to give than receive

Many families focus on money from a selfish perspective. It is all about the desires of the individual members of the family. It is all about accumulating more and more so that you can spend it on things that will (supposedly) “make you happy.”

However, happiness just does not work that way. Many families are empty and miserable because they have not learned the joy of giving that stems

from practicing good stewardship! Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Interestingly, the word translated “blessed” also means “happy.” So, it produces a greater degree of happiness to *give* than it does to *receive*! Ultimately, the family that is focused on living for God will be giving to support the work of the local church and to help those who are in need, as they are able.

Remember, as stewards of all your money and possessions, the money your family has is on loan from God. It has all been entrusted to your care. So, while He wants you to take care of your family’s physical needs and accomplish some other things to take care of your family (as we will discuss later), He wants you to be prepared to give the money back to Him whenever He needs it for something (i.e. to help teach the gospel, to help people who are in financial need, etc.).

And, this principle is true whether you have been given little or much. God cares about the heart that you and your family demonstrate more than He cares about the actual dollar amount of the gift you give. For instance, as Jesus watched people giving money in Mark 12:41-44, He saw many rich people put in a lot of money from their prosperity. Then, He saw a poor widow who put in two mites (a very small amount). He concluded that this woman had put in more than all the others because she gave out of her poverty all that she had, while the others just gave out of their abundance.

Must keep money in the proper perspective

People have a way of losing perspective about money very quick. People throughout this world (and the majority of families) live as though “money is what makes the world go ‘round.’” So, the more that people can do to accumulate money, the better off people and families will be. Or, so you would think.

But, the reality is that while money is *useful*, it is far from the most important and necessary thing. Even from the perspective of having the things we need to survive, remember that God will provide if we seek Him first. So, seeking God and doing His

will is even more important than seeking the physical necessities of life that money is used for!

For instance, just prior to giving those instructions about seeking God first (in Matthew 6:25-34), Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Please note that “mammon” is a reference to wealth/money. Unfortunately, the way people have coveted after money has made it their god (Colossians 3:5).

Ultimately, you and your family must remember that money and every physical thing it can ever buy will be burned up when Jesus returns (2 Peter 3:10). And, whenever you die, you will not be able to take any of your money or possessions with you (Luke 12:13-21). Then, even while you and your family live on this earth, your money can be stolen, your possessions can rust and decay, etc. So, you and your family should learn to lay up your treasures in Heaven rather than on the earth (Matthew 6:19-21)!

You must remember that no matter how much your family accumulates during your time on earth together, it is never worth more than a single soul! Jesus asked, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). He also warned that “it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23). So, you and your family must choose to seek God first and do what is in the best interest for every soul rather than focusing on earthly wealth!

God-Shaped Financial Priorities For The Home

With a God-shaped view of money, a family should be in a much better position to set priorities concerning their finances that please God and accomplish good. In fact, as you search the Scriptures, God’s word provides a blueprint for some financial goals that your family should set.

To be united in handling money God’s way

Satan wants to divide and conquer your family. As I have already mentioned, one of the most successful ways he has been able to accomplish this is through money and finances. He certainly knows that he can put a lot of pressure on and test the strength of any home through financially difficult situations.

So, it is important for a family to choose to be united in handling money God’s way. While this is most important concerning a husband and wife, it is also important for parents to get their children to learn how to handle money God’s way. For instance, Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” And, in Luke 11:17, Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.”

So it is whenever families cannot agree on how they ought to handle money. There is great strife and conflict. There is selfishness and greed. There are foolish decisions. And, rather than helping the family work together to accomplish God’s goals for their money, the family is torn apart by money! Therefore, husband and wife (and those who are considering marriage) must sit down with their Bibles and determine to listen to God’s blueprint for money. If they will choose to be united on this, there will be a lot of hardship that is saved later (or a lot of problems solved that had already developed).

To earn a living and support the family

We have already seen the connection between work and money. Although some men are unable to work (i.e. cannot find work, physically unable to work, etc.), those who are able to work are expected to work. Once again, if a man chooses not to work to support his family, he is said to have “denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

Certainly, a man who is so unconcerned about the physical wellbeing of his family that he puts his own lazy desires above the needs of his family is no true follower of Jesus Christ! For, Jesus Christ loved His bride (the church) enough to give

His life for her, to “sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26-27).

This is how the Christian husband is expected to love his wife (read all of Ephesians 5:22-33). Surely one of the most basic components of such a sacrificial love is to make sure that he does everything he is capable of doing to provide for the needs of his wife and family, and provide additional income for them to enjoy as there is opportunity (as discussed previously). Then, let me also add that whenever husbands and fathers fail to fulfill their role, wives and mothers will have to do whatever they can to provide for the needs of the family. This is fitting with the kind of love that they are to show for their family (as identified in Titus 2:4-5).

To give back to God

Anyone who is a Christian and receives the gift of financial blessing from God has the responsibility to give back to God according to his/her prosperity. While we have already discussed this point generically (as it pertains to being a steward of the money), I want to consider a couple of commandments that are given.

First, families must prioritize contributing to the work of the local church. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” This is the only way the local church is authorized to raise money in order to accomplish its God-given work. So, whenever your family makes decisions about what you will do with the money God has blessed you with, you ought to make sure that God gets His first! Although there is no specific amount that has been commanded, God wants people to give generously to support the work of the local church (see 2 Corinthians 8-9 for more about this kind of giving).

Second, families ought to manage their money in such a way that they will be prepared to

help others who are in need as they are able. Galatians 6:10 commands, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Your finances can help you do good to others. For instance, you can give food and drink to those who are in need. You can help buy clothes for those who are in need. And, you can even help to teach people the gospel by purchasing Bibles and Bible study material and supporting gospel preachers. But, whenever families do not view and manage money God’s way, they either allow many opportunities to pass them by because they are focused on selfish things or they have mismanaged their own money to the point that they have no money left to help other people!

To save and be prepared for the future

The Bible teaches the importance of using wisdom to avoid waste and prepare for the future. Unfortunately, many families get into trouble because they fail to listen to these two principles. Instead, it is common for people to spend their last dollar in pursuit of some earthly desire at a given moment. Then, they have nothing left and are in need the rest of the month, when they get sick, when they lose their jobs, or when they get older. But, by applying God’s blueprint, we can avoid bringing such trouble on our families.

Listen to a couple passages from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 21:20 says, “There is desirable treasure, And oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man squanders it.” Then, Proverbs 6:6-11 says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.”

Surely, we must choose to manage the money in the family with wisdom. We must not be so shortsighted that we choose to engage in carefree pleasure today and not consider whether we will have enough stored up for tomorrow, next month, or years down the road! While we must not go to the other

extreme of being stingy and hoarding, we must give reasonable consideration to the future and not waste what we are blessed with today!

To live within your means

It is commonplace for people today to believe in living beyond their means. The evidence for this is clear. Banks regularly advertise loans for any kind of project or possession you could want. Businesses have special financing options to purchase their products. Credit card companies want people to take the ability to borrow someone else's money with them in their wallets. Cash advance and payday lending companies are located in many places. "Buy now, pay later" and "same as cash" advertising schemes are commonly used by businesses to attract customers.

Society has made it very easy and convenient for you to spend other people's money rather than live within your own means. Rather than saving up for whatever your family desires, the world often tells you to go ahead and have it now. Yet, there are at least two things that happen that can harm your family in this.

First, your family ends up owing more in the long run. This happens because of the cost of borrowing someone else's money (we call this "interest"). So, rather than helping your family, it puts a financial strain on your family more than it would have to save for the thing until you could pay for it with the money God has blessed you with!

Second, you sign your family up for slavery. Listen to Proverbs 22:7: "The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant [slave] to the lender." Now, I want to be careful in that I am not saying borrowing money is a sin. But, you must recognize that whenever you borrow money, you give the lender leverage over you and your family. Not only does this rob you and your family of peace (since you are concerned with paying back the lender), but the lender can also repossess the item or be rewarded damages from other things that you and your family have. In the past, there have even been worse consequences (i.e. debtors' prisons).

Then, the ultimate way that living beyond your means fails is because you to show a lack of

contentment for what you have (as 1 Timothy 6:6-10 discussed). Instead of living beyond your means to accumulate physical things you desire, you should choose to be content with what God has given you and save for things that need purchased. So, families should practice living on a budget every month and make sure they are not spending more than they are taking in and work to pay off any debts that have been incurred previously.

Training Children To Handle Money God's Way

Many of the money problems that families have come from two sources. First, the culture of the world is such that it does not view or handle money God's way. Second, the way our parents managed (or mismanaged money) has been passed on to us. So, if godly parents can make changes in how they view and handle money, they can do a lot to impact their children to view and handle money God's way! This is an important part of training up our children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). As you reflect on the lesson we have studied, consider four brief points that should be helpful in training our children with money.

Train them to work

We have seen the connection that God gives between diligent and honest work and money. Children need to have this same truth impressed on their minds from an early age. For, early in their lives, mom and dad (and, perhaps, grandma and grandpa) are their source of income. And, while there is nothing wrong with giving them gifts at times, we must be careful not to give our children everything without requiring diligent and honest work. If they are not taught the value of hard work now, parents will have done them a great disservice and they may always feel entitled to "a free meal."

Train them to give first

Whenever children get money, they often think about the toy that they could buy and have fun

with. But, just as God wants us to be good stewards of the money we possess, we must teach our children that the money is God's gift and they should use it in a way that pleases God. This certainly includes giving. They should be taught that it is more blessed to give than receive. So, when they earn or are given some money, they should be taught to set aside an appropriate amount to give (i.e. to put in the collection plate in the assemblies of the local church). Then, this amount should be set aside before they consider how much the new toy costs that they want! And, they should be trained to be selfless with their money and help others when they see needs and opportunities to help.

Train them to save

Again, when children are given money, they often think about what they can buy at that moment. Yet, they should not be trained to be so careless with their money. Instead, conscientious parents should train their children to save for the future. Rather than buying a cheap thing now that will not interest them or will break in a few days, teach them to save up for something that is much better. And, as they grow older, teach them to look into their futures and begin setting aside money for their first cars or for their college educations.

Train them to live within their means and be content

If your children see you living beyond your means, they may want to as well (until they finally recognize how bad of a decision it was). So, they may ask you for regular advances or borrow money from their siblings in order to buy something they just "have" to have right now. But, this point goes right along with the last one. Children should be taught that saving their money will help them be prepared for the time when there is something more expensive they would really like to have. Then, just like adults get into trouble by living beyond their means, children can get into trouble doing the same. Maybe they just run up so much debt that they cannot repay it. Or, maybe the lender (i.e. a classmate) chooses to demand payment immediately, whether the child is prepared to pay or not. Therefore, conscientious

parents should teach their children how to be content and to live within their means.

Conclusion

Although the Bible is not a book on personal finances, it does teach the family how to view and manage money in a wise way. Rather than money being a source of conflict, stress, and struggle in the home that works to separate the family, it can be used in God's way and help the family through life. So, no matter what your financial situation is, you should look to God's blueprint for a transformation in your ways of viewing and handling money. When you give God control of your family's finances, it will produce peace in that area and eliminate it as a source of conflict in the home!

Study Questions

How does Satan destroy homes through money and finances?

1. A God-Shaped View Of Money

How is money a gift from God?

What connection does God teach should exist between money and work?

How are you a steward of your money?

How is godliness with contentment great gain?

Why is it important to give and be selfless with your money?

Why should you train your children to save?

What is the proper perspective you need to keep money in?

Why should you train your children to live within their means?

2. God-Shaped Financial Priorities For The Home

Why is it important to be united in handling money God's way?

What is the importance of working to earn a living and support your family?

Why is it necessary to give back to God?

Why should you save and be prepared for the future?

Why should you live within your means?

3. Training Children To Handle Money God's Way

Why should you train your children to work?

Why should you train your children to give first?

Lesson 11:

God's Blueprint For Solving Conflict In The Home

Whenever members of the home depart from the blueprint God has given, conflict often follows. The kinds of conflict that can exist in homes can happen in many different areas and between all the various members. Unfortunately, there are many homes that not only have conflict, but that also do not work to solve the conflict God's way.

God really does give us the perfect blueprint for all things pertaining to the home. So, if every member of the home will be committed to following the blueprint, conflict will be avoided. Then, God also gives all the answers to help us solve the conflict that does come up.

Of course, you must recognize that it is Satan, not God, who wants conflict in the home. Satan is the one who is pleased and served by most of the confrontations, arguments, strife, and division that happens in the home. Satan is the one who wants there to be barriers built between all the members of the home. God wants everyone to be unified in following His blueprint.

But, even in homes that work to pattern themselves after God's blueprint most of the time, people still sin and conflict results. So, we must all learn to both apply the pattern God has given so as to avoid the conflict (as we have already been considering) and the pattern God has given us for solving conflict in the home. Therefore, even when you are in the midst of a conflict in the home, you must remember to handle it God's way. Let's consider just a few points that God teaches us about handling conflict (generally) and make application of these points to the kinds of conflict we face in the home.

Determine To Seek Reconciliation

Conflict represents a kind of separation. There is some kind of strife or friction that exists between you and another person. So, whenever you recognize that this is the situation, you have a choice to make. Either you will ignore the conflict or you will determine to seek reconciliation.

Don't ignore conflict

Conflict, by its nature, is uncomfortable. It is not something that most people enjoy. So, there is a great temptation to just ignore the conflict that exists in the home and hope that it goes away on its own. Unfortunately, this especially seems to be a common character trait of men in the home. But, the head of the home should also work to lead his family through the conflict that comes up rather than to ignore problems and allow them to escalate!

Now, let me be perfectly clear, I am *not* talking about petty disagreements that just go away whenever people come to their senses about things. For, there are times for your words to be few and not to respond in haste to something that will not amount to anything. Don't go making a conflict where there is no real conflict!

Instead, I am talking about a real point of strife and division in the home. These things do *not* go away by themselves. Actually, these things have

a way of getting worse with time! So, God says that these things need to be dealt with appropriately.

Listen to Matthew 5:25-26. “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

While we will discuss verses 23 and 24 in just a few moments, I want you to notice the focus in this verse on agreeing with the one who is your adversary “quickly.” Not only is this true whenever conflict has set you and a neighbor as adversaries, but it is even more important whenever the adversary is in your own home. Although the conflicts in the home often do not involve judicial punishment, there are many serious consequences to these conflicts. Thus, you must not allow conflict to go on in the home without the proper resolution.

Then, listen to Ephesians 4:26-27. “Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”

There is a way for the emotion of anger to be experienced in righteous ways. But, this does *not* involve yelling and screaming at the members of the family, acts of violence, profanity, and other destructive words and actions. Then, the real point I want to focus on is the fact that you must not allow the sun to go down on your wrath.

There are many times when conflict happens in the home and the emotions of those involved are stirred up – and nothing is done to resolve the conflict. So, it lingers and festers in the hearts of those involved for hours, days, weeks, months, and even years. And, the longer it goes unresolved, the further it isolates the family members from each other. While it is true that sometimes you will need to step away from a conflict for a moment to make sure that you get your emotions under control (so that you do not make the situation worse), you should do your very best to make sure that every conflict gets resolved as soon as possible – and never allow conflict to be held over to the next day! For, the longer that conflict is allowed to fester in the hearts of those involved, the more place (opportunity) is

given to Satan to cause some real trouble in the home!

If someone has something against you

There are really only two situations that you can be in regarding conflict. One is when another person has sinned against you (which we’ll discuss momentarily). The other is when you know someone else has something against you. God wants you to be diligent in resolving either occasion that has brought about conflict. Actually, in the ideal scenario, both the one who has sinned and the one who has been sinned against will meet each on their way to be reconciled to each other!

So, consider the situation in which you know that someone in your home has something against you. Whether you think you are guilty of something or not, you should do what you can to be reconciled to the other. If you even suspect that someone in your home has something against you, you should be so interested in resolving conflict that you deal with it as quickly as possible!

Listen to Matthew 5:23-24. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

The picture is someone under the Mosaic system of offering sacrifices bringing a gift before the altar to worship God. Upon arrival, this one remembers that a Jewish brother has something against him/her. Rather than continuing to offer this gift to God, this individual must go to the brother and seek reconciliation. Then, this person can come back and offer the gift to God.

There are a couple of significant points to consider from this text. First, you need to be quick about things whenever you recognize that there is conflict because someone has something against you. Perhaps you have done something to injure another person in some way. Perhaps you have said something that has built a barrier. Regardless of what it is, you must not allow other things to prevent you from seeking reconciliation as quickly as possible. Admit that you could be wrong. And, even if you are

sure you did nothing wrong, you should still do what you can to be reconciled. So, this one was even to leave the gift that he/she brought to offer God and seek reconciliation.

Second, you must recognize that seeking reconciliation is important to your worship and service to God. God cares about how your relationships are whenever you try to worship Him. The same kind of conclusion can be reached from 1 Peter 3:7. In this text, Peter gives instructions to husbands about how they are to treat their wives, implying that their prayers could be hindered if they failed to comply with the instructions. So, in the same way, the gift that you are trying to offer to God may be hindered if you know that someone has something against you and do not do anything to try and correct it!

If someone has sinned against you

Here is the second possible scenario regarding conflict in the home. This time, rather than being the one someone else has something against, you are the one who has been wronged. Still, God wants you to be so focused on reconciliation that you do whatever you can to be reconciled.

Consider Matthew 18:15-17. “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

So, God does not want you to wait on the one who has sinned to realize that he/she has sinned and caused conflict. Instead, whenever you become aware of a wrong that someone in the home has done against you, you have the responsibility to go to such a one and try to convince him/her to repent of the sin that has been committed. Then, in a matter of sin, you must not just leave the situation if you have tried to resolve the matter and the one who is guilty of sin has not repented.

Jesus says that your next step is to take one or two more with you. Go back to that person who has

sinned with them. This time, all of you will be able to hear the situation and know the truth about the matter. Then, if he/she still will not repent of sin, you still must not give up.

The final step that you can take in trying to resolve this issue in conflict is to tell it to the church. Now, the sin has been publicly identified. And, there are consequences for the individual. Whenever both people involved in the conflict are Christians, this means that there will be a withdrawal that must take place (compare with 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

While I recognize that this passage is primarily applicable whenever the two people involved are Christians, I believe there are some principles that can help us through all conflict. For instance, whenever anyone in the home has wronged you, you should go directly to that individual. Make sure you understand the situation appropriately. Then, if sin is involved, try to bring that person to repentance. For, the conflict will not be resolved unless there is repentance. Then, if the sinner will still not repent, having some Christian brethren help you confront the problem is an excellent next step in working toward a resolution.

Determine To Do Your Part

Since every conflict has at least two sides, you can only do your part to bring about a positive resolution. You cannot correct the entire situation by yourself. But, you *can* do your part. You can determine to do as much as you can possibly do to be reconciled to another. Consider a few things that you must remember, then, as you try to do your part to resolve a conflict.

Be humble

One thing that is lacking in any conflict is humility. Listen to James 4:1-6. “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do

not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously’? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’”

There are many homes that have fights and “wars” that break out in them. So, in order to resolve them, it is helpful to consider where they come from. James says that they come from our own desires for pleasure that are at war in us. Therefore, God is teaching us that the fights and conflicts that happen in the home come from valuing ourselves more than we should. Instead of focusing on the good of the others in the home, our conflicts result from seeking our own desires.

Therefore, if you want to solve the conflict that is in the home, you should do your part to be humble. After all, that is the solution God gives in James 4. To be humble is to have a modest estimation of yourself. Then, you will not think your own desires and pleasures are more important than the good of anyone in your home. So, you will not be conducting yourself in sinful ways that would cause conflict.

Furthermore, humility will demand that you admit whenever you are wrong. Thus, conflict will not continue in the home because you are unwilling to admit whenever you have acted selfishly. Instead, humility will help you to repent of the sin that you have committed and harmed other people with. And, humility will help you do whatever you can possibly do to help the people you have hurt with your sinful behavior.

Then, as another application of humility to the conflict in the home, your humility will help you go to the one who has wronged you. You will not be so prideful as to think, “Well, if he/she wants to make things right and be reconciled, he/she knows where to find me.” Instead, your humble concern for others will help you take the steps in the direction of the one who has wronged you!

Be sacrificial

One of the problems that often happen in the home is that people seek to get even whenever someone does them wrong. However, this will only further escalate the conflict and make it more difficult to resolve. And, it will also put you in sin (or further in sin) by acting in a way that God does not approve.

So, Jesus teaches a sacrificial and loving response even when someone does you harm. Consider Matthew 5:38-42. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

What Jesus is describing here is certainly not the first reaction that most people would have to such a conflict. But, then again, most people are not interested in following God’s blueprint. And, consequently, most people do not have the kinds of fulfilling relationships God’s blueprint leads us to have.

So, most people will fight for themselves rather than being willing to suffer wrong for the good of another. Even in relationships, many people are in them to get the most that they can from others. Therefore, whenever there is conflict, they approach the conflict from a selfish perspective (as we saw from James 4).

But, those who are Christians and want to handle conflict and relationships God’s way are willing to sacrifice. So, even when someone in the home mistreats you, you should be willing to endure wrongs and sacrifice of yourself in order to do what is in the best interest of the other person. While that does not mean you must always give another person what he/she *wants*, it does mean that you should sacrifice of yourself in order to do/give what the others *need* (even if what is needed is not what is wanted)! Remember, your life is not about getting

what you want on this earth, it is about serving and glorifying God!

Be peaceful

Conflict is not a very peaceful thing, of itself. And, the way that many people respond to conflict only makes more strife between people and breaks relationships. So, as a Christian, you must always do your best to make peace – even when others want to make conflict.

Consider Jesus' simple statement in Matthew 5:9. He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God." Notice the positive statements that are made in this verse. Those who are "peacemakers" are blessed (or, happy). Being contentious and unwilling to resolve conflict leads to miserable relationships. But, those who work diligently to do what they can to make peace with others (without compromising the truth of the gospel) are the ones who will have more fulfilling relationships. Then, those who are peacemakers will be called children of God (who is a God of peace and is the author of peace, according to 1 Corinthians 14:33).

Consider the negative implications of this verse. If you do not work diligently to make peace with others, you will not be truly happy and you will not be called a child of God. In fact, listen to Hebrews 12:14. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." So, it is impossible for you to please God in your life if you do not actively pursue peace with "all people" and you *will not* go to Heaven and see God! These instructions are so broad (again, including "all people") that they certainly include those who are members of your home.

Then, consider Romans 12:17-21. "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Here is the extent of your responsibility in making peace. You must simply do all that you can (short of compromising the truth of the gospel) to make peace with the members of your home. You cannot control whether others seek peace with you. But, you can control whether you work toward peace with them or whether you act in evil ways toward them. Therefore, you must diligently overcome any evil that has happened in the home with a peaceful commitment to doing good!

Be Christ-like

Ultimately, Jesus Christ provides the perfect blueprint for solving conflict that exists in the home. After all, he faced all kinds of people during His life who wanted to make conflict with Him. But, He always handled the situations in the right way. So, we have the record of His life as the perfect example to follow in handling conflict.

1 Corinthians 11:1 simply says (in the context of living peaceably and harmoniously with Christian brothers and sisters), "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." So, even the apostles provide a pattern for you to use in living your life and overcoming conflict in the way God would approve (compare with Philippians 3:17). Then, recognize that Paul is not saying that he is perfect. Instead, you should only imitate him as far as he imitates Christ Jesus. Again, Christ is your perfect blueprint in all things. Therefore, you must strive to replicate the kind of life and decisions that Jesus made in your own.

Certainly, this general principle applies specifically to matters of conflict. Listen to 1 Peter 2:21-25. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

First, recognize that this is what Peter said in response to teaching that Christian slaves must obey their masters in all things (even when they are mistreated). Sometimes people treat others in ways that cause them to suffer unjustly. Yet, even then, you have the responsibility to follow God’s blueprint in how you respond! Jesus Christ should be a great encouragement to you in this. For, Jesus suffered the greatest mistreatment of anyone who has ever lived (because He really had done *nothing* wrong)! Instead, He chose to sacrifice Himself for the good of others. Therefore, you should consider, “How would Jesus respond to my conflict” – and then respond accordingly!

In responding to conflict in the home in a Christ-like way, you will show Christ to the members of your home (and, potentially, to others). So, even though members of your home may not be living in the way God would desire them to live, your godly conduct (even in times of conflict) can win them to the Lord. For instance, Peter told Christian women (right after his teaching about slaves and Christ), “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Determine To Pursue Unity In Truth

One of the many things that conflict does is that it works to divide a household. There are many divided homes as a result. This is sad because of the truth Jesus taught in Luke 11:17. He said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.” Division always works to cause ruin. So, you must always work to pursue unity in truth in your home.

Work to maintain the unity of the Spirit

Listen to Ephesians 4:1-6. “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of

the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Now, I want you to notice that unity does not just happen. Instead, recognize that lowliness (humility), gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another are involved. Then, even after you put on all these characteristics, you must work at it diligently. Paul said, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Notice the reason why your household can be united. This passage (though it is talking about the unity in the church) helps us to realize that there is “unity of the Spirit.” So, as the Spirit has revealed the word of God to us, He has only revealed one perfectly unified message (notice all of the *ones* in verses 4 through 6). Now, if homes were dependent upon a uniting of all the various opinions man is capable of having, true unity would be an impossible dream. But, since God has revealed a united message that should guide every person and every decision made in the home, unity is quite possible!

Consider some other helpful passages of Scripture that emphasize unity and the reason why a home can be united. 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Philippians 1:27 says, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” And, Jude 1:3 says, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Since God’s word has been “once for all delivered” to us, every member of the home can live

by the same standard. It never changes or gets revised or updated according to the times. Instead, all members of the home should be committed to allowing God's word to solve the conflicts that exist. Whatever God's word says about a matter ought to settle the conflict and everyone should strive together for the faith of the gospel. But, while you cannot control whether everyone else in your family responds to conflict in that kind of a way, you can control whether you look to the word of God and seek unity with the members of your home in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Seek wise counsel

One passage that gives you an example of how Christians should respond to conflict is Philippians 4:2-3. "I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."

Here were two Christian women who had some kind of conflict with each other. Now, I do not know what the nature of this conflict was. But, this passage demonstrates that even two people who are interested in doing what is right and laboring in the gospel can have conflicts. So, as Paul became aware of this matter, he pleaded with them to be united in the Lord (as we have just talked about in the previous point). Then, he encouraged someone to help them be reconciled (no name is mentioned, only the phrase, "true companion").

Yes, sometimes even Christian people need help through conflict. There are many possible explanations as to *why* this is so – not the least of which is that sometimes we just have a difficult time separating our own emotions and being able to see the situation for what it really is. So, sometimes we have difficulty seeing our own faults. Sometimes we have difficulty rightly judging those we are emotionally involved with. Sometimes we are so occupied with our own suffering that we have difficulty responding to the situation correctly and communicating with the one who we are in conflict with.

Consider the situation Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 6 whenever there was conflict between some in the church at Corinth. Paul condemned the practice of a Christian taking another Christian to court (before a human judge who does not understand the truth of God's word). He said that such activity was shameful and asked, "Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?" (verse 5). Instead of failing by taking a Christian brother/sister to court before an unbeliever, Paul asked, "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" (verse 7).

So, the principle is that, as a Christian trying to solve conflict, you should use a wise brother or sister in Christ to help you whenever the conflict does not seem easily resolved by yourself. But, remember that he/she should be a fellow Christian and be wise. For, if you seek out counsel from someone who does not stand for the truth of the gospel, you may be led in the wrong direction! Proverbs 1:5 says, "A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel." Remember that there is nothing shameful in seeking the right kind of help in resolving conflicts in your home! Then, you must also be committed to acting on the wise counsel that is in harmony with God's word.

Bear with one another's weaknesses

One other necessary requirement for you if you want to seek unity in truth is that you recognize that not all points of conflict are about matters of right versus wrong. For, the Scriptures clearly teach that there are matters of individual liberty. These are matters that are of no consequence in God's sight. He has authorized both the doing of a thing and not doing a thing. So, He does not care what decision a person makes in these areas.

Yet, people often choose to make conflict over matters of individual liberty. So, the apostle Paul penned some instructions to the Christians in Rome to help them in these matters (in Romans 14 and 15). You would do well to consider both of these chapters and all the instructions and applications that are given.

There will be differences in the home in matters of opinion. Some will be stronger in the faith than others. Therefore, some will have a better knowledge of the Scriptures and a better ability to apply the Scriptures appropriately to the various situations that are encountered in life than others. Yet, division must *never* be accepted in this area.

Instead, the apostle Paul gives instructions to both the strong and weak in these two chapters regarding how each is to treat the other. For instance, to the strong, Paul says, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1). “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples [weaknesses] of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). So, the one who has the greater spiritual knowledge and maturity ought to consider the conscience of the weak member of the home and not cause that individual to stumble and sin. And, the one who is strong is not to be argumentative about the opinions held by the one who is weak in these matters of liberty.

Then, the apostle Paul also addresses the one who is weak. In the specific issue of eating meat (which is a matter of liberty), Paul said, “let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him” (Romans 14:3). Therefore, this one must try to recognize that the issue is a matter of liberty and should not pass a condemnatory sentence of judgment on the one who does not share his/her personal convictions. For, God has received such a person.

Conclusion

Not only does following God’s blueprint help people keep from causing conflict, but it also helps people solve conflict. Since every person chooses to sin from time-to-time, it is essential that each member of the home choose to respond to conflict God’s way. For, Satan likes nothing better than to cause conflict and for the members of the home to respond to conflict in a way that further deteriorates the home. But, God has all the answers – if you will simply choose to build according to His blueprint. Thus, as far as you can control, you can always be

building in your home and working toward unity and peace in Jesus Christ!

Study Questions

How does Satan try to use conflict to destroy the home?

1. Determine To Seek Reconciliation

Why should you *not* ignore the conflict that exists?

What should you do if the conflict is because someone has something against you?

What should you do if the conflict is because someone has sinned against you?

2. Determine To Do Your Part

How will being humble help you solve conflict?

How will being sacrificial help you solve conflict?

How will being peaceful help you solve conflict?

How will being Christ-like help you solve conflict?

3. Determine To Pursue Unity In Truth

Why is it important to maintain the unity of the Spirit?

Why is it important to seek wise counsel?

Why is it important to bear with one another's weaknesses?

Lesson 12:

God's Blueprint For Restoring Broken Homes

God's blueprint is perfect and it is powerful. Whenever you are choosing to begin a home, following this blueprint will result in a home that is pleasing to God and that truly fulfills its God-given purpose. Ideally, those who are considering marriage will closely examine this blueprint prior to beginning their homes so that decisions can be made that please God.

But, this blueprint is also effective whenever homes have already begun and decisions have been made that do not please God. Satan has been effective in influencing many homes not to follow God's blueprint. This has resulted in broken homes. Sometimes, these homes have been broken many times over due to various departures from God's blueprint.

Still, God's blueprint has the answers to restore broken homes to what God desires them to be. Yet, you also must recognize that you cannot fully restore a broken home by yourself. Although you can and should do your part in the home, a fully restored home is going to take the cooperation of every member of the family.

So, whenever you recognize that your home is broken, you need to first change yourself and make

your commitment to following God's blueprint for the home. Then, you need to encourage the other members of your family to search out God's blueprint and build accordingly. When every member of the family is committed to building according to God's blueprint, homes that have been broken and appear hopeless can thrive and accomplish God's true purpose for the home! Therefore, let's consider some specific areas for you to evaluate as you focus on restoring a home that is broken.

Restore Righteousness

Throughout this series of lessons, we have talked about how Satan has tried to influence our homes not to function according to God's blueprint. The simple fact of the matter is that sin is behind *every* home that is broken. So, in order to restore a home, every member of the home must be committed to restoring the kind of righteousness that God desires to be present in the home. When true righteousness is in place in the home, the destruction that has resulted because of sin will be no more. Following the pattern in Jeremiah 1:10, you must root out, pull down, destroy, and throw down everything that is evil in the home and is not according to God's standard of righteousness, and then build and plant only that which is pleasing to God.

Put off the old man

If you and your family members have been allowing sin to remain in your lives, you have contributed to the destruction of the home for long enough! Listen to Romans 13:11-14. "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

You have spent enough time living for your own selfish desires that work against your home and your salvation. Every minute that you spend in sin is another minute that you take your home further away from the blueprint God has made for the home. Now, it is long past the time to wake up out of your spiritual slumber in the darkness of sin and it is time to put on Jesus Christ and live for righteousness.

Just take some time to evaluate yourself and consider what kinds of unrighteousness you have been involved in. Ephesians 4:22 says, “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” Colossians 3:5 says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth....”

Then, Colossians 3:5-9 goes on to identify some of the things that you must put to death in your life, including: Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language. All of these things (and every kind of sinful activity) work to destroy your home. Therefore, you cannot allow anything that is sinful to remain in your life if you want your home to be built according to God’s blueprint!

Then, after you make the determination to put off the works of sin/darkness in your own life, you should work to encourage the other members of the home to do the same. Not only do these things destroy the home, but (most importantly) they destroy the soul of every member of the home. The result of these things is eternal spiritual death (separation) from God in Hell (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8).

Put on the new man

Putting off the old man of sin is a good place for you to begin in the home. But, it is only the *beginning*. Your home will not be restored if this is where your efforts end. Instead, you must also work to put on the new man who is committed to living according to God’s standard of righteousness.

For instance, Romans 13:11-14 did not stop at casting off the works of darkness. Instead, you must also “put on the armor of light” and “walk properly, as in the day.” Ephesians 4 continues (after instructing to put off the old man), “and be renewed

in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:23-24). Then, Colossians 3 also speaks of putting “on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10).

The place every member of the home (who has reached the age of accountability) must begin in this area is by becoming Christians. There can simply be no true righteousness without individuals doing what God has required of them to become followers of Jesus Christ and have their sins forgiven by God. So, those who have sinned and need to be forgiven must: (1) Hear God’s word (Romans 10:17), (2) believe in Jesus Christ (John 8:24), (3) repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), (4) confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and (5) be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

After being obedient to God’s plan of salvation, you must live in a different and transformed kind of way and remain faithful to God throughout your life on this earth (Revelation 2:10). Colossians 3:12-17 identifies some specific things that will now be part of your new life in Jesus Christ: Tender mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, willingness to bear with others, commitment to forgive others, love (the kind of true love God wants you to show toward all people, including the members of your home – as discussed in lesson 2), peace, thankfulness, and a determination to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then, this new way of life is even going to extend to the order of the home (see Colossians 3:18-21).

You must begin this transformation by becoming a Christian yourself and making the kinds of changes God wants from your life. Then, you should go to work on your family members. Try to teach by both word and example to your spouse so that he/she will also be converted to Jesus Christ. Then, train your children in the way of righteousness that is patterned after God. The more people in your home who will put off the old man of sin and put on the new man of righteousness, the more your home will eliminate the sin that destroys it and be restored to the kind of home God desires for you to build!

Restore Marriage

In lesson 3 of our study, we discussed God's blueprint for marriage. In it, we considered God's marriage law. Yet, it is common for homes today not to have followed God's blueprint for marriage or God's marriage law. This *always* results in a broken home. And, the only way that God can be pleased is when His blueprint is applied to each one of these situations. Consider a few examples.

Eliminate fornication

There are many people who try to have a home today while two people are having sexual relationships and living together outside of marriage. Yet, God condemns this as the sin of fornication. Remember that Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

The fact of the matter is that this is not a real home. Two people have never even made the kind of commitment to one another that God desires in marriage. So, this pretend "home" is set up for failure from the start. And, studies even show that couples who live together before marriage have an even higher divorce rate than the average (which is already exceptionally high today)! So, it is certainly a mistake to try to begin a home by living together outside of marriage "to see if it will work out"!

Then, sometimes this situation is complicated further by a child or multiple children who are born to this kind of relationship. Although there are now responsibilities that fall on the parents (as we discussed through this series), a decision still must be made between the man and the woman. It is unacceptable for them to continue living in sin and it is harmful to the child to be raised in that sin-filled environment! Yet, the fact that there is a child does *not* mean that the parents must marry one another. While they must no longer live together and engage in fornication, two wrongs do not make a right.

Eliminate homosexuality

There are some "homes" that are formed between those who are of the same sex. But, this has

never been God's plan for homes. Instead, Jesus (in referencing the beginning of the marital relationship in Genesis 2) said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Notice that God's blueprint for marriage includes a male and a female. A man was to be joined to his wife. They are the ones who should become one flesh. Every time the Bible considers the subject of homosexual relations (and never does it even mention homosexual marriages), it always condemns them as sinful relationships. For instance, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

Then, not only are these relationships spiritually dangerous, but they never produce the kind of home that pleases God and they harm any children who are involved in that "home." There is no way to begin with a homosexual relationship (whether a marriage or not) and build according to God's blueprint. The only way to make any kind of marriage that pleases God in this is for the two partners to get out of that sinful relationship and enter a God-approved heterosexual marital relationship.

Eliminate adultery

Then, there are some homes that are formed with people who are in an adulterous relationship. With the high rate of divorce that we are currently experiencing, this is becoming increasingly more common. A high percentage of folks have been divorced at least one time. And, many people have been through two and three divorces (and some even more than this).

Now, divorce is acceptable to God under one circumstance. Matthew 19:9 and Matthew 5:31-32 identifies that it is acceptable for one who is innocent

of fornication to divorce one who is guilty of fornication. Then, this one who is innocent of fornication and divorces the one who is guilty of fornication has the God-given right to be remarried (to one who also has the God-given right to be married).

But, many people have departed from God's blueprint concerning His marriage law and find their homes built on marriages that do not have God's approval. Like with the homosexual relationship, God condemns this relationship (as being adultery, see Romans 7:2-3). And, the only course of action that is appropriate is to end the adulterous marriage. Although this is not an easy thing to do, it is far more important for every member of your home to serve God than to maintain a sinful relationship that will result in people spending eternity in Hell (as those who are involved in adultery will, according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). As painful as it is, you must end your involvement in an adulterous marriage and do your best to raise any children there may be outside of this relationship. For, you must love Jesus Christ even more than your spouse (see Luke 14:26).

Restore Order

Even in homes that begin with God-approved marriages, Satan has convinced a lot of people not to fulfill their God-given role(s) in the home. This quickly destroys the order that God has intended for there to be present in the home and always keeps the home from functioning in the way that it should. So, in order for a home to please God and be the most fulfilling that it can be for everyone involved, the God-given order of the home must be restored.

Husbands and fathers

As we discussed in lesson 4, God has a blueprint for the role of husbands and fathers. For one, God has assigned the leadership of the home to this individual. Ephesians 5:23 says that "the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church." So, one of the common problems that occur in homes today is that the husband and father does not fulfill his leadership role. Sometimes, he

will neglect his role of leading his family and force others (namely, his wife) to pick up the slack. And, sometimes, the problem is that the man tries to lead his family, but he leads them in a way that does not please God.

The husband also has specific responsibilities toward his wife. This includes loving her as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25-33), dwelling with her in understanding, and giving honor to her as to the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Then, this includes working to provide for her needs (1 Timothy 5:8). Yet, there are some husbands who do not treat their wives in this kind of a way. The result is a broken home.

Fathers have also been given some specific responsibilities toward their children. These also include working to provide for their children (1 Timothy 5:8). Then, there is the responsibility to train up their children in the ways of God (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). Yet, there are some fathers who are not engaged with their children to be an active presence in the lives of their children so as to provide the proper direction. Or, even worse, some fathers are an active presence in their children's lives; but, they actually lead their children in the wrong direction.

Wives and mothers

Wives and mothers have a special God-assigned place in the home. While there are many women who fight for control and leadership of the home against their husbands, this only works to destroy homes. The woman has a position that only she is qualified to fill. And, whenever she uses her abilities to fulfill this God-given role, it is a truly wonderful thing that is full of blessings to every member of the home.

As a wife, she has the responsibility to love her husband (Titus 2:4). She must also submit to him in all matters of opinion, as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1-6). Then, she must also show her husband the respect that is due one to whom God has given authority in the home (Ephesians 5:33). And, she must be a keeper of the domestic affairs of the household (Titus 2:5). When she does not do these things and tries to undermine

her husband's authority, fight against him, or pursue goals that neglect her God-given responsibilities at home, she works to destroy the home.

As a mother, she has the responsibility to love her children and always act in their best interest (Titus 2:4). As a necessary part of this, she must see to it that they are well taken care of while her husband works to provide (Titus 2:5). And, as the one who will be spending the most time with the children, she also has great responsibilities in training the children in the ways of God (Proverbs 22:6). But, whenever mothers neglect this role, the home breaks. If she chooses to pursue selfish desires rather than fulfill her God-appointed role, there is always something (or someone) that suffers.

Children

Children are blessings from God to any home. And, they are great opportunities for parents to train part of the next generation to serve God. Then, children have a way to contribute in the home as well. Namely, children should be committed to showing wisdom by learning from others (especially their parents, see Proverbs 13:1). Yet, whenever children have no interest in listening to the wise counsel of their parents, there is destruction that is sure to happen to the home.

So, children must obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). They must learn to respect the authority that their parents have over them and learn submission to that authority. Even (and especially) when parents instruct something that a child does not like, the child must be taught to yield his/her own desires to the desires of the parents. But, if children rebel against this authority, not only will this have devastating consequences for the child – but also for the home.

Then, a child's responsibility toward his/her parents does not end whenever he/she grows and leaves the home. Instead, the Bible teaches that children must learn to have such respect for their parents and grandparents that they repay them later in life (see 1 Timothy 5:3-16). It is truly sad to see children and grandchildren who have such disrespect for their parents and grandparents that they are

unwilling to do what they can to help their aging parents and grandparents – financially or otherwise!

Restore Trust

Whenever there have been failings in the home, one of the first things that is broken is trust. So, those who have failed in the past and contributed to the current state of a broken home must determine to do whatever they can to restore trust. For, whenever a member of the home conducts himself/herself in selfish ways so as to sin and go against God's blueprint in any area, the other members lose confidence in him/her. Instead of seeing someone who is working for the best interests of the entire home, the other members of the home see someone who is okay with putting himself/herself first – even at the expense of the family! So, consider some steps that someone who has demonstrated this kind of selfishness can take to restore trust.

Experience godly sorrow

Sorrow is an important step in gaining trust in any home. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Then, the apostle Paul said, "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Whenever a member of the home has sinned, sorrow should be experienced by that person. If he/she does not appear sorrowful about his/her failings, the others will not have any reason to trust that person or think that any real change has been made. But, even when sorrow is experienced, it must

also be from the right source. For, it is not enough for an individual to sorrow over sin because he/she got caught or is experiencing some physical consequence. Instead, there must be true godly sorrow for the sin that has been done. This is the only kind of sorrow that will result in true and lasting change – and a restoration of trust.

Sincerely repent

God wants everyone who has sinned to repent of their sin. Jesus said, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Later, the apostle Paul said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is a determination to live differently. It involves looking on your past sin with abhorrence, hating every part of the sin you have committed. You don’t look back on that selfish decision as being pleasurable or desirable. Then, you determine that you will not make that kind of selfish decision again. Instead, your determination must be to only make decisions and conduct yourself in ways that please God. Without this kind of sincere repentance, there will be no real and lasting change for people to look to and trust you again.

Seek God’s forgiveness

Your sin has not just caused your home to suffer. Instead, your sin has spiritual consequences and you are not trustworthy in God’s sight. You have shown Him that you will choose to live for your own selfish pleasures and treasures rather than do His will.

So, you must seek God’s forgiveness of the sin you have committed. If you are not a true Christian, God will forgive you whenever you are obedient to His plan of salvation (that we discussed previously). If you have done this at one time and have went back into sin, you must repent, confess your sin to God, and ask Him to forgive you (see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:9). When you do this, God forgives you. And, once you are forgiven by God, other people should be able to see that you are living a changed life and work to trust you again.

Confess your sin to others

Although the only confession that you must make of private sin (sin that only you and God know about and that only affects you) is to God, public sin (sin that at least one other person knows about and/or affects other people) must be dealt with in a more public way. So, if your family members know about or are affected by the sin you have committed, you must confess your sin to them.

Look at James 5:16. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Just think about it. How will the people who know you have sinned know that you regret that sin and want to be forgiven of it unless you tell them? So, you need to confess your sin specifically (i.e. name what the sin is) to those who are aware of it. This will help them recognize that you are determined to live differently and that you are seeking their forgiveness, acknowledging that you have hurt them in the past by your selfish conduct.

Produce the fruit of repentance

Now, we must not stop there. For, just admitting to wrongdoing does not always result in true change. So, many people will be hesitant to fully trust another again until there is evidence of a real change. Although godly sorrow, repentance, seeking God’s forgiveness, and confessing your public sin to others are necessary and should work to re-establish trust with each step, this final step is what should help put it “over the top.”

God teaches you to produce the fruit of repentance. For instance, Matthew 3:8 speaks of bearing “fruits worthy of repentance.” Acts 26:20 says that the gospel requires people to “repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Thus, your repentance and confession must not be *empty* and *action-less*. Instead, it must be fruitful and truly demonstrate a new way of living. This will help people recognize that you have truly changed from all of the selfish and harmful ways you may have conducted yourself in the home previously!

Restore Forgiveness

Another problem that has kept homes broken is how the members of the home have dealt with the past sins that have been corrected (as I described in the previous section). There are some who have been unwilling to forgive and move beyond the past sins. So, the fault for the broken home now lies with the one who is not willing to forgive. In order for the home to be restored, there must be the right combination of correcting the sin God's way and forgiving the sin God's way.

Forgiveness is commanded by God

It is common for folks to have been hurt so much or so many times, that they do not want to open themselves up and give the offender another opportunity to hurt them again. While we understand this sentiment, we also must apply what God teaches about forgiveness. In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Now, sometimes, we may be guilty of thinking that there is a limit to the forgiveness that we must offer to another person. Yet, Jesus teaches against any kind of arbitrary limit. Certainly, there is no place where this may be experienced more than in a home. So, even though someone in the home may sin against you seven times in one day, you must forgive whenever that individual says he/she has repented.

During the lifetime of the members of the home, these transgressions are likely to start mounting up. And, this often results in people getting divorces or having relationships that are not what God would have them to be. Yet, whenever Jesus was asked by Peter, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21), Jesus responded, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). So, there is to be no limit placed on forgiveness in the home – no matter

how many times or how badly a member of the home may sin against and hurt you.

True forgiveness is patterned after God

As a further response to Peter, Jesus told him a story to illustrate what true forgiveness looks like (see Matthew 18:23-34). There was a servant who was indebted to a king so much that he could never have repaid the debt. When he pleaded for mercy, the king forgave him of all his debt. Then, that forgiven servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount of money. Yet, when the fellow servant pleaded for mercy, he would not forgive him. Now, when the king found out about this conduct, he was furious and demanded that the servant he had forgiven be punished for his failure to show the same kind of mercy to another.

As this parable applies to the great forgiveness God has shown to each one of us, Jesus concludes by saying, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (verse 35). Surely, you have sinned against God and incurred a debt that could never be paid – at least once. Perhaps you have sinned against God many times (even many times in one day). Yet, you want God to forgive you. In the same way, God says that you must forgive others who sin against you (even those in your home). Colossians 3:13 says, "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Now, just as you must learn to forgive from God, you must also learn what it means to forgive by the way God forgives. True forgiveness involves much more than just saying, "I forgive you." In fact, whenever God forgives you of your past sin, it is like a great and unpayable debt being entirely wiped away. It is not held against your charge any longer. And, so it must be for how you forgive others. Although the sin may have caused great personal suffering, you must strive diligently not to hold the sin against the other any longer.

Pressing forward in the home

In order to restore a broken home, there must reach a point at which everyone in the home decides to all press forward *together!* Rather than living in sin or failing to forgive, sin must be corrected and forgiven. Then, there must be a collective effort to move beyond the past failures that have happened in the home and reach forward together.

Listen to Paul, in Philippians 3:12-14. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul had done many things against God and against other people in the past. But, he realized that he could not live in the past if he wanted to serve God and live eternally in Heaven. So, he determined to forget those things that were behind (in the sense of allowing them to hold him back) and reach and press forward toward “the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if homes that have been broken (perhaps broken many times over) decided to do this same thing? Correct the things that have caused the home to break, grant true forgiveness, and don’t allow the home to be held back by the past any longer! Just push forward and build together according to God’s blueprint!

Conclusion

God’s blueprint can fix your broken home! No matter how much your home has been broken. No matter how long your home has been broken. If you will determine to build according to God’s blueprint and convince the other members of your home to build according to God’s blueprint, your home can be what God would have it to be!

No matter where you or your home are right now, it is not too late to build according to God’s

blueprint! Other blueprints have been followed throughout the course of human history. But, they all fail in some way. The only blueprint that really does result in the best possible home is God’s blueprint. Then, when God’s blueprint is followed, it is a spiritually beneficial thing for every member of the family!

Study Questions

How has Satan broken many homes?

1. Restore Righteousness

How is putting off the old man important to restoring a broken home?

How is putting on the new man important to restoring a broken home?

2. Restore Marriage

How is eliminating fornication important to restoring a broken home?

How is eliminating homosexuality important to restoring a broken home?

How is eliminating adultery important to restoring a broken home?

3. Restore Order

How is restoring the order for a husband and father important to restoring a broken home?

How is true forgiveness patterned after God important to restoring a broken home?

How is restoring the order for a wife and mother important to restoring a broken home?

How is pressing forward important to restoring a broken home?

How is restoring the order for children important to restoring a broken home?

4. Restore Trust

How is experiencing godly sorrow important to restoring a broken home?

How is sincerely repenting important to restoring a broken home?

How is seeking God's forgiveness important to restoring a broken home?

How is confessing your sin to others important to restoring a broken home?

How is producing the fruit of repentance important to restoring a broken home?

5. Restore Forgiveness

How is forgiveness important to restoring a broken home?