

21. Got a perfect family?

February 24, 2013

I checked out the definition of 'dysfunctional family' from Encyclopedia:

A dysfunctional family is a family in which conflict, misbehavior, and often child neglect or abuses on the part of individual parents occur continually and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions either by fear or apathy. Children sometimes grow up in such families with the understanding that such an arrangement is normal and they often carry their lives in the same manner to their children as well.

Do you know that God also has a dysfunctional family? Not because He is an abusive Father to us, but because we are sinful people from the beginning.

Apostle Paul taught us 'submission' in chapter 5 verse 21 of this Book:

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We went from wife submitting to her husband to husband loving his wife as Christ loved His church and gave Himself for her. We're still within his theme of mutual submission to one another.

Instead of making separate applications at the end of this teaching like I normally do, I will give you applications throughout the study. So please pay attention.

A. TO CHILDREN

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2

"Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Apostle Paul is speaking to children who are believers of Jesus Christ and the children of born-again believers. He is expecting children that obedience to their parents is part of how they serve Christ. Jesus Himself, the very Son of God, was submissive to His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary.

Young people, listen to what apostle Paul commanded here. God has placed your parents in authority over you because you need the wisdom, guidance, and protection they can provide. In other words, your parents are entrusted by the Lord to care for you and guide you with the Word of God that is the Bible.

Your home is a school for life, with your parents ideally teaching and equipping you to live out the Gospel of Christ and walk in love and righteousness. In God's design, they are for you, as a mirror of how God Himself is for you.

You may think, "Well, my parents are not perfect." Just in case you have not noticed, young people, you are not perfect either. There is no one perfect except God. So, don't expect them to be perfect parents.

In v2, the apostle is quoting the fifth Commandment from the Ten Commandments. It still applies to the NT believers. Though we are not under the law of the OT, the concept and revelation of the Ten Commandments still relevant to the holiness of God, and the Holy Spirit enables us to practice that righteousness in our daily lives. All of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament epistles for the Christian to observe except, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

To “honor” our parents means much more than simply to obey them. It means to show them respect and love. I have a question for you, young people. Have you ever obeyed them on the outside but on the inside you called your mom or dad ugly names? Honoring your parents goes deeper than grudgingly obeying; it means doing what you’re told—even if you don’t agree out of your respect for them and your love for them.

Then, you have this nagging question in the back of your mind: “What if my parents want me to do something that would mean disobeying God?” The answer is, “You respectfully obey God instead. But don’t try to include everything that they tell you to do as disobeying God – such as, cleaning up your room, taking the garbage out, not fighting with your siblings, doing homework and chores, etc.

In v3, apostle Paul reminds us and you young people that there is a promise for honoring and being obedient to your parents – live longer. One of the OT laws that was given to the Israelites was that when a child, young or older, is disobedient to his or her parents and is mouthing off to them, the town people simply ought to take the child outside of the town and throw stones at the child and kill him or her. I don’t think that there were many grumbling teenagers in Israel during the OT time, don’t you think?

This promise does not mean that everyone who died young dishonored his parents and those who are obedient to his parents will live until 120 years old. Apostle Paul was stating a principle: when children obey their parents in the Lord, they will escape a good deal of sin and danger and avoid the things that could threaten or shorten their lives. Life cannot be measured only by quantity of time, but it is also measured by quality of experience. God enriches the life of the obedient child no matter how long he may live on the earth. Sin always robs us; obedience always enriches us.

Young people must learn early to obey mom and dad, not only because they are your parents, but also because God has commanded it to be so. Disobedience to parents is rebellion against God. The sad situation in homes today is the result of rejecting God’s Word.

Don’t take a cue from your rebellious friends who call their parents every name in the book, nor should you follow the ungodly and ignorant trend from TV sitcoms and commercials that portray parents as fumbling dummies. Behind these kinds of TV sitcoms and commercials, there is a demonic plan that desires to destroy your family through you by influencing your brain with their garbage. Don’t fall for it, rather honor your parents and be respectful to them as you learned today. The Lord will bless you for it.

B. TO PARENTS

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.

Paul next turned to fathers as heads of families, but the principles apply to both parents.

If left to themselves, children are selfish and sinful and they will be rebels, so it is necessary for the parents to train their children. Someone said, “Everything in the American home is controlled by switches except the children!” The Bible records the sad results of parents neglecting their children, either by being bad examples to them or failing to discipline them properly.

David pampered Absalom and set him a bad example, and the results were tragic. Eli failed to discipline his two rebellious sons and they brought disgrace to God's name and defeat to the nation of Israel. In his latter years, Isaac pampered Esau, while his wife showed favoritism to Jacob; and the result was a divided home. Jacob also was showing favoritism to Joseph, but God providentially rescued the boy and made a godly man out of him in Egypt.

Parents can provoke their children and discourage them by saying one thing and doing another, by always blaming and never praising, by being inconsistent and unfair in discipline, and by showing favoritism in the home, by making promises and not keeping them, and by making light of problems.

I find three important things parents must do for their children:

1) Parents must nurture their children

Over a decade ago, someone asked the former President George Bush, Sr., "What is your greatest accomplishment in life?" He had many accomplishments to talk about. But he answered, "My children still come home to see me." There is a man who has his priorities in order.

It is not enough to nurture the children physically by providing food, shelter, and clothing. Your children must be nurtured spiritually and emotionally.

You can find each situation you and your children come across can become an opportunity for a life lesson from God's perspective. Teach them and show them by spending your time in the Bible and prayers first, then spending your time with your children.

Your children will not care about what kind of house they used to live in or what kind of car they were in, but they certainly will remember the conversations they had with you and how much they enjoyed their time with you.

2) Parents must discipline their children

Parents, you are called to be parents for your children, not friends. You can become their friends after they grow up, but not while they are growing up. Some parents want to be accepted by their children so much that they choose not to discipline their children. You are ruining them and their future. You are going to make them into animals or monsters who don't care about anyone or anything else except themselves.

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

Modern psychologists oppose the old-fashioned idea of discipline, and many educators follow their philosophy. "Let the children express themselves! If you discipline them, you may ruin their characters and self-esteem." Yet discipline is a basic principle of life and an evidence of love. There is a Greek word for they say – Hogwash.

Between God's counsels from His Word, the Bible and modern day shrinks, I will choose the Lord's Word any day.

We must be sure, however, that we discipline our children in the right manner. To begin with, we must discipline in love and not in anger, lest we injure either the body or the spirit of the child, or possibly both. If we are not disciplined in the Word of

God first, we surely cannot discipline others, and “flying off the handle” never makes a better child, rather a bitter one.

I’ve seen the results of this from some of the domestic violence calls that I went on with my sheriff deputies. There is a big difference between child discipline and child abuse. With the first one you get to have a peaceful home; the second will land you in the Pima County Jail where we will see you on TV 10 o’clock news.

Here are three bullet points regarding child discipline:

- **Abuse is unfair, extreme and degrading.**

Abuse is usually harsh, unnecessarily long and totally inappropriate. When you drag children’s feelings through emotional mud and kick them emotionally when they are down, you are being abusive. The result of abuse often leaves emotional scars, if not physical ones, that lasts a lifetime. Abuse doesn’t grow out of love; it stems from hate.

- **Discipline is fair, fitting and upholds the child’s dignity.**

Discipline is built on a foundation of justice and fairness and it is biblical. It is not abstract. The child should have a good idea of the punishment that will be dished out if parental authorities are willfully and defiantly violated.

This form of correction actually strengthens the child’s character rather than shatters. Discipline is rooted in proper motivation – love and genuine concern – not in anger or expedience. That is why it is the best not to discipline your child with anger .

- **Give your children room to grow, to make mistakes**

Every child needs space in which to learn, make mistakes and develop his or her own character within the proper limits. As a parent, it is important for you to distinguish between childish irresponsibility and willful and defiant behavior. You need to pick when it is necessary to discipline your children, not for every little clumsiness and forgetfulness.

3) Parents must instruct and encourage their children with training and admonition

Too many parents rely on punishment alone to discipline their children. But by doing that, they’re neglecting to give their kids the assistance they need in understanding and applying God’s Word to their lives.

At the same time, if they are obedient and do what you ask them to do, let them know how proud you are of them. You don’t have to buy anything special for them. Just let them know that you are pleased.

How well-prepared are you to shape your children’s wills with the wisdom of God’s Word? Are you training them in the way they should go or disciplining them for going in the way they shouldn’t?

The Book of Proverbs is loaded with nuggets of wisdom to help train in righteousness – discipline – your children. Read it, please.

C. TO BLENDED FAMILY

With the high rates of divorces even among Christian marriages, we have many blended families. Child discipline becomes a very hot potato between husband and wife.

Husbands and wives, please remember your priority: God first, your spouse second, then your children. DO NOT choose your children over your spouse. If you don't, you will have another divorce coming up or at least another miserable marriage.

If your family is a blended one, I highly suggest that you discipline your own biological child with the complete support from your spouse.

Remember, your children can read your looks as well as books, so do not express your disagreement against your spouse's discipline for that child whether your family is a blended or not. While one of the parents is disciplining a child, the other parent should not roll one's eyes, or let out a disgusted sigh in a disagreement of the discipline, or storm out of the room. The child will take a cue to manipulate you two. Children know and utilize a simple tactic – 'Divide and Conquer'. Even 3-5 years old know how to effectively use it against mom and dad, not to mention, step parents.

You must discuss and agree on the amount, contents and length of discipline to the child behind the closed door quietly, not in front of your child. The discipline should be painful enough for them to realize that it is not worth it to go through it again.

Don't threaten them with unrealistic disciplines and punishments – such as grounding them for next two years, etc. Your children know that it is not going to happen and it just cheapens your words to them.

If they insist that they are older and they should be treated differently, treat them as an older one with more responsibilities in the house. They may not like all the responsibilities that go with the older age.

One last thing, parents, if you did something wrong to your children, be honest and courageous enough to ask them to forgive you. They will forgive you and they will love you more for it.