

Strengthening the Family

Strong Families Make a Strong Church

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 17-Jul-04; Tape #676

One may not be a rocket scientist to realize that the family is under attack in America. And because America is what it is in the world, American culture and American "values" are being spread all over the world. And we can then say, therefore, that the family itself is probably under attack all over the world because American values and culture has done almost nothing to spread the doctrine of good family.

It used to be, in the "Ozzie and Harriet" days (1950s American family television show) the family was something that we were all into and proud of. We tried to have the nuclear family or something like it. The American dream was to own a home and be married and have a family, and all the stuff that comes with it.

But, times have changed quite a bit.

It would not be difficult to illustrate how the times have changed. It would not be difficult to spend the entire sermon just reading things I could grab off the internet in terms of articles, accounts of people's lives, editorials and statistics that would show the family is being undermined everywhere. It is in decline in every sector—in our schools; undermined in our churches. In particular I am thinking about what is happening in the Episcopalian/Anglican church. They have a "gay" bishop and certainly that undermines family. He (the bishop) undermined his own family by divorcing his wife and going to live with his male lover. What a mess that is.

It is being undermined in government; in media—just about everywhere. Family is being undermined. Hardly a sector of society does not take a swipe at family life at some point.

Now, some of it is deliberate. I just mentioned the homosexual problem in the Episcopalian church. But, the whole homosexual lobby is that way. It is designed to break down the American family. They are trying to impose "gay" marriage—I hate to even call it that. It is not marriage. Also, "gays" are adopting children. "Gay" partner benefits that they want to get here in Charlotte for everyone. They have done that in many places around the country. And, many corporations offer them.

And "gay" rights of every stripe. It does not matter. They are all over the United States trying to get this, and they are a very rabid, militant group of people.

By the best statistics that we have been able to find the number of homosexuals in the United States does not add to more than about 2 percent—maybe 3 percent at the outside—of the U.S. population but they have a power that is far beyond their numbers. And that power is being used to undermine the American family, American marriage, American child rearing practices and everything that has to do with marriage.

Like I said, on their face their demands are aimed at the destruction of the traditional family—a man, his wife, and their children.

Families are taking a beating as a by-product of the humanist, hedonistic, post-modern culture that we have had for the past 40 years or so. This bashing of the family developed naturally from the sexual revolution because it simply emphasizes sexual license over responsibility. How in the world are you supposed to have a stable family if the man and his wife are doing whatever they want to do sexually? It cannot happen.

And not only that, what about all those trysts (for lack of a better word) that they had before they got married? People do not think that they have any impact on the marriage, but they do! They undermine trust.

And as you know, these days, they also bring in diseases.

Feminism is another area that has undermined the family in order to promote women at any cost in every place, and every sector of society. And they have moved women out of the home and into the work force. And what that does is strip the family of a vital mainstay—something that is needed in the home.

And of course, what it has done is put women in competition with their husbands in many respects, and that is no way to be! It is supposed to be a cooperative effort on the part of husbands and wives to raise a family. But if they are competing against one another what are the results going to be of that?

Then of course, liberalism in all forms stresses the individual and his rights, at the expense of the community and responsibility. And, those are the things which a family typifies in society: community and responsibility. Those are *family* values. It has typified these things for thousands of years.

And here, just over a few decades those wonderful God-inspired institutions—like family, like marriage—are being struck down to the point where we cannot even get an amendment to the constitution passed to say that marriage is between a man and a woman—one man and one woman.

Family takes its licks from well meaning but clueless sources as well. Verna Simkins was nice enough to send me an article that appeared in the April 7th, 2004 Wall Street Journal Online, which I would like to read parts of now. It is about how the home industry—the housing industry—is now helping to undermine the family of all things! Particularly, home designers.

This article is called, "New Floor Plans Provide Peace, Quiet, and Privacy." Now that is a nice way of saying something else. Quoting here:

"Carl, and Tiffany Ledbetter like to spend time at home together, just not necessarily in the same room. So, they built a 3600 square foot house with special rooms for studying and sewing, separate sitting areas for each kid, and a master bedroom far from both. Then, there is the 'escape' room, 'where any family member can go to get away from the rest of us,' Mr. Ledbetter says. The Mercer Island, Washington

industrial designer says his 7 and 11 year old daughters fight less because their new house gives them so many ways to avoid each other. 'It just does not make sense for us to do everything together all the time,' he says. After two decades of pushing the open floor plan, where domestic life revolved around a big central space and exposed kitchens to give everyone a view of half the house, major builders and top architects are walling people off. They are touting one person internet alcoves, locked door away rooms, and his and her offices on opposite ends of the house. 'The new floor plans offer so much seclusion they are good for the dysfunctional family,' says Gopal Ahluwalia, director of research for the National Association of Home Builders. At the international builders show in Las Vegas earlier this year, the showcased ultimate family home hardly had a family room. It was broken up into a media center and a separate home management center, which itself was divided by a counter top. 'We call this the ultimate home for families who don't want anything to do with one another,' says Mike McGhee, chief executive of Party Homes of Los Angeles, builder of the model. Designers say the new anti-social architecture is partly a backlash against the enforced camaraderie of the residential layouts of the 80s and 90s with their guest rooms and shared spaces that made it tough to get away from it all and tougher to hide messes from guests."

A little further down:

"The new 'closed door policy,' some designers say, 'also appeals to the growing number of people who marry and have children later, and who are accustomed to having time to themselves. Don Evans, an Orlando, Florida architect said that he is drawing up plans more often for America's blended families. He might be in his fifties, while she might be her thirties, and the kids could range from very young to teen-agers. 'People want walls today,' he said, 'You need separate spaces to stay married.'"

A little further down. This is from a 51 year old homemaker who says:

"We all need a little downtime from each other."

The final paragraph: (This is the only thing in the entire article where another view point is brought in.)

"The approach isn't for all architects. William Sherman, chairman of the Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the

University of Virginia says, 'All the cut up spaces make families more isolated, and lonelier than ever. People don't even gather in the same spot anymore,' Mr. Sherman says, 'It's sad.'"

And that is my comment on it too. You might as well have separate apartments.

And so, where is the next attack on the family going to come from? You never know! It is bad enough on T.V. and all the sitcoms and whatnot that destroy the family. But, know we have homes out there that put each person in the family into his own separate place, keeps them from ever relating to one another.

So, as Christians we need to do our part to reverse this trend—at least in our own lives. We need to realize how important the family is to us, and to society, and we need to do what we can to strengthen our families for their sakes, as well as for our own, because we are going to learn the most about God's Way of life if we have families that are a good environment to learn those things.

The Bible, of course, as you have already heard in the news, during this marriage debate, and whatnot, is Western Civilization's premier advocate of monogamous marriage. Monogamous marriage is the basis of the family. It all begins there.

From Genesis to Revelation marriage and the family is emphasized and encouraged. It started with Adam and Eve, and it goes through such luminaries as Boaz and Ruth, and it ends with Christ and the church. Marriage is everywhere in there.

I will not say that just about every writer mentions it, but it is pretty close. The Bible contains actual chapters regarding instruction on marriage, and the family; and numerous individual verses throughout the Bible in the form of laws, proverbs, songs, prophecies, and straight up teachings. And, I have not even mentioned the examples of certain good and bad marriages that are shown in the Bible. There were mistakes that were made, and good things that were done.

The Bible supports marriage from cover to cover.

However, if we were to study family by the use of a concordance, we would get almost nowhere. That is because the word family, even though it is used about 150 times in the Bible in the New King James Version, all but a handful of these are in the context of genealogy, such as "the family of Levi," or "the family of Aaron," etc.

And so, they do not really give you instruction on family. They are just basically genealogy telling you who someone belongs to.

And as I have already alluded, most instruction regarding family, and family relations is dealt with under the subjects of marriage, and childrearing; not as "this is family instruction." You have to get it through the institutions of marriage and childrearing.

So, I want to begin our search in the Bible by seeing how vital family is in God's scheme. And, we are going to start right at the beginning in Genesis 1. This is the first thing that God said to man as far as recorded by the Bible:

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "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."

So, the very first command that God gave mankind concerned marriage and family. Marriage, and children, I should say, which is the family. And He mentions here specifically that He made them male and female. Mankind is not just man. It is man and woman. And He did this so that procreation could take place. And at the same time, He created marriage.

Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 2:21-24 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." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

So, here we have it, right there the first thing after man and woman were made, He told them to be fruitful and multiply. And He also told them to be one flesh. Man and woman joined in marriage as one, a complete pair of humans. They became basically one entity in two parts.

God did this—God made marriage—for the purpose of making sure that there was a suitable environment—a proper environment—for the growth and development of children.

Now, there are other things that can be learned, also, through the institution of marriage between the partners in the marriage, obviously. We go into that in many respects when we go into Ephesians 5 and talk about relationships between husbands and their wives.

But in another great respect marriage was made for the proper rearing of children. No other environment works as well as marriage to produce mature children of intellect, who can go on to become parents themselves. No other environment works as well especially for spiritual development. And in the end, that is what God is looking for: Spiritual development in His children.

We will see later on that that is exactly what He is looking for: Children of His own.

Now, here in this situation in Genesis 1 and 2, God was attempting to get mankind off to the right start. But, we know that these two in particular had nothing but family problems. From the little that we know about them, we know that they had *serious* problems in their family. These are the first human beings.

Now, it started off with, as we know in Genesis 3, as Mr. Armstrong used to say, Eve wearing the pants. She was the one who Satan came to. And she, instead of asking Adam for his opinion, or respecting his authority, went ahead did what seemed right to her.

And, Adam was not faultless in this either because he basically abrogated his authority, and did what she said.

So, it started badly, and it got worse from there, because after this point, they were cursed. We do not need to go into that today—you can find that in Genesis 3:16-19 or so. Suddenly, with these sins that they did, the environment changed. It just made matters worse.

We see in chapter 4 that they produced the first murderer. The first one born became the first one to kill, and he killed his own brother. From there over the next 1500 years or so (before the flood) it just got worse. It produced a society that was totally corrupt and wicked.

God decided at some point that He had had enough.

Genesis 6:8-13 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

And then down to verse 17, after He tells them to make an ark:

Genesis 6:17-18 And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which *is* the breath of life; everything that *is* on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Genesis 6:22 Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Now, God decided to start over again, and He started over with a family—Noah's family. This time, the family had a pretty good history. Noah was a righteous man—a just man, a man who had grace in the eyes of God. He was a man that God knew from experience would do the best he could with his family.

And, Mrs. Noah I assume was his match—a genuine help mate—a person—comparable to him. Nothing much is said about her, but she seemed to have been pretty supportive of him through 120 years or so of ark building, and the preaching that he did, and then having to go through

the flood, and caring for all the animals, and all else that happened after the flood getting a civilization restarted. She seemed to be a pretty good trouper. It is never mentioned anywhere in there that she complained, or that she looked back at the civilization that she was leaving like Lot's wife. She seems like an upstanding person with what little we know. And, we are assuming.

But, they produced Shem. Shem was a pretty good guy. And, he took up where his father left off, as far as we understand.

And, I am sure that Ham, and Japheth had their own good qualities, but we know even less of them, but they seem to be pretty upstanding men in their own right. We know almost nothing about their wives. But, God included them as well.

So then, He started off with not just one family, but four. And, they all looked to Noah and his wife as examples. And they got off to a much better start, because Noah did all that God commanded him to do. Noah walked with God. He was one of those who set the standard for society.

So, it really started off on a better foot this time because a proper family environment set the standard.

Now, we know as with all human civilizations, it, too, went down the tubes. But, it had a better chance getting started with the family of Noah, than it did with the family of Adam and Eve.

Here we are, and we have only gotten six chapters into the book, and we have two huge examples of family—one bad, and one good. Six chapters in and that is not very far. It is very foundational to this way of life.

And the lessons continue in the lives of the Patriarchs. We are given a great deal of detail about the family of Abraham. Less about the family of Isaac, but there is some there in his dealings with his sons, and with his wife.

There is a great deal about the family of Jacob, and the problems that he had. If you want to count them, from chapter 12 pretty much through chapter 50 are little examples here and there about family relations. The book of Genesis is full of them.

This is the foundation of society—marriage and family.

Now, notice in the calling of Abraham in the 12th chapter, God had family in mind. God had Abraham's family in mind, He had the family of mankind in mind, and He also had His own Family in mind—the Family of God.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now God really got things going by calling Abraham because it is from Abraham that His Nation

would come. And then from His Nation would come the One who is alluded to in verse 3, "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

As Mr. Armstrong often said, this is a promise both of race and grace. Race in the fact that He set Israel apart for the things that He wanted them to do as the example nation, but they were also set apart as the line from which Jesus would come. In many respects, that was the more important thing.

And then grace, of course, came in the Person of Jesus Christ who would come through Abraham and who would be very much like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

So, for this to happen, first God said, 'Abram, you are going to have to cut off all ties with your family because I am setting you apart to start another family. And it is going to be a family that is quite different from what has happened before—what has grown up before on the earth. It is not going to be a family that is large at first.'

God even says in the book of Deuteronomy that He did not choose them because they were the most numerous of all people. He chose them because He loved them. And, that should give us clue about where families start. It starts with the love of a father.

But, even so, through this digression, it is good to include this in your thinking.

However, He told Abram, "Even though you are going to have to give up your family, those who are in Haran, I am going to give you another family—a far better family—a family that will spread all over the world, become a great nation; and a family through whom the greatest thing to ever happen on this earth will occur. And, because of your sacrifice in doing this, every family on the earth will eventually be blessed."

So, God had in mind from the very beginning of Abraham's calling of family.

Like I said, Abraham's family, all the families of the earth, all the family of mankind; and He has his mind on the Family of God—basically begun right here with the calling of Abraham who is the father of the faithful. And that is when the real work began to bring about the Family of God.

This, you might say, was its inception.

And here we are, only a dozen chapters into the Bible, and it is all laid out on the table right here.

Now, if we go to Ephesians 3, verses 14 through 21, we will see what mankind's history has been pointing to:

Ephesians 3:14-21 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the

fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Now the Family of God is the thing that God has been working toward all the time. It is the Purpose of God—the Family of God could also be called the Kingdom of God. It is the same thing.

And what Paul is asking God for us here in this prayer is for the things that would produce growth in us. He ends there in verse 19, "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God?"

Now, if you take that to its ultimate point—being filled with the fullness of God—it is becoming God, is it not?

And so, we have here this idea of the family of God which he mentions specifically in verse 15, that to become part of His Family we must become what He is. And as Mr. Armstrong always used to say, we are but an embryo at this point, because we are still physical. Do the old hat-pin test. This was specifically regarding being born again. But, the hat-pin test works because we cannot really be born into the Family of God until we are spirit, because kind reproduces kind, and we are not yet of the God-kind.

But, we are working toward it. We have already been made initiates in the Family of God, but there are things that we need to do, and part of it is what Paul asked God for us here—that knowledge, that obedience of becoming full of what God is through God's Spirit, all those things are necessary to become full fledged members of that Family.

And so we spend years developing just as children spend years developing in physical families. And I think that we can see very easily the parallel between a physical family, and the Family of God. It does not take much of a leap to see that, because God calls us sons and daughters. Did He not have a Firstborn? Are we not supposed to follow that Firstborn?

And of course, as mentioned a few minutes ago, He talked about being born into it. The parallel is very close, and the same things, qualities, and teachings are needed to produce both mature Christians as well as mature, physical adults. Things like love, nourishment, knowledge, experience, obedience, faith, loyalty, hope, and I could go on and on. All of these things are needed by children to become mature human adults, as it is for the rest of us mature human adults to become mature spiritual Children of God—part of His Family.

The same basic elements are necessary in both because they are things that cause growth—physically in human children, and spiritually in God's children.

And, the end of each, the goal of each, is maturity—physical maturity for our children, and spiritual maturity for us, Christians.

He repeats this. If we go over one chapter to Ephesians 4:12 which is very well known, he tells us that God gave us, the ministry in various offices:

Ephesians 4:12-16 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

He uses several metaphors there that have much to do with human families, and human maturity. And, they apply pretty much one on one to spiritual maturity, and entry into the God Family.

I think that the parallels between physical and spiritual families are obvious.

Now, the sermon at this point is going to take a bit of a turn because we are going to go into what I feel is the main subject or topic of today, which is how to strengthen the family.

It is more of a how-to, giving us the principles involved here that we really need to key in on. And what I am going to do is start with the most basic.

What is the first thing you think of when you think of Exodus 20? The Ten Commandments! I want to read verses 12 and 14 because two of the 10 commandments concern the family

Now we can make a strong case that all the other ones do as well, however, these two are specifically directed at the family.

Exodus 20:12 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

Two very simple commands. Very basic. The 5th is directed toward the children, obviously, and the 7th is directed toward parents. You should say everyone. But, in the context of family, it is mostly directed toward the parents. These are the two major elements of family—children, and parents.

So, we have one major commandment that is directed at each of the two major elements of the family. And God considered these two elements, principles, to be so important to family life that He included in His basic law. And if we want to say them in a way that is not real biblical sounding, the first one is respect for and fear of constituted authority (parents)—that would be the 5th commandment, and the 7th commandment would be faithfulness—loyalty.

Now, those are non-religious ways of looking at them. Respect for authority or the fear of authority, and faithfulness or loyalty.

If you think about it, these two elements are sorely lacking in families today. You do not have

to go very far to see children disrespecting their parents. Just go down to your grocery store sometime. That is all you need to do to see it—the women with their young children either in the cart, or walking beside it.

I hardly ever go into grocery stores, but I have experiences like that frequently when I do. These children are running wild and the mother might say, "Johnny! Back here!" But the kid does not listen, and he goes, and he breaks a jar of applesauce or something. "Clean up on aisle 12!"

It happens quite often. Children sassing their parents, talking back openly. Like I said, you do not have to go far to find that.

But, for the most part I point the finger of accusation at the parents for not demanding the respect that they deserve from their children, and for being unfaithful to one another. That is the second principle.

I think that we could solve many of society's problems if we all would make a sincere effort to bring these two practices back into our families. Just doing these two commandments—honoring our parents, and remaining faithful to one another—would turn this society around.

Of course, we have got to do this in the church of God. That is where we start. We are not going to work on society unless we are working on ourselves, and our own families.

Now, before we look into the 5th commandment a bit deeper, think about this: Although the 5th commandment is aimed at the children, specifically, it is the parents responsibility to teach it to them. If they do not get taught, they will not respect. It would be a rare occasion that a child would on his own respect his parents if they did not teach it to him. What I am saying is that we parents teach our children *to* disrespect us. That is just the way that it works. Children's minds are basically mush when they begin, and what we put into them, or fail to