

Strengthening The Family

Strong Families Make a Strong Church

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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. 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.

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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 childrearing 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.

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.

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.

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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

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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.

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.

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 sake, 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, is Western civilization's premier advocate of monogamous marriage. Monogamous marriage is the basis of the family. It all begins there.

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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. 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.

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.

I want to begin our search in the Bible by seeing how vital family is in God's scheme. 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."

The very first command that God gave mankind concerned marriage and family. Marriage and children, I should say, which is the family. He mentions here specifically that He made them male and female. Mankind is not just man. It is man and woman. 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. 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.

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.

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

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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.

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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. Again, we are assuming.

But, they produced Shem. Shem was a pretty good guy. 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 He started off with not just one family, but four. And, they all looked to Noah and his wife as examples. 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.

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.

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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."

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'm setting you apart to start another family. And it's going to be a family that's quite different from what has happened before—what has grown up before on the earth. It's 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. 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.

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However, He told Abram, "Even though you're going to have to give up your family, those who are in Haran, I'm 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. 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.

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."

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

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. 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. 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?

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 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. 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.

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. 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 ten 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. 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 *dis*respect 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 put into them is going to produce what they become. And if we fail to teach them the proper manners, respect, and fear of us as parents, then it cannot develop in them.

And if they are not going to fear or respect us, they are not going to respect or fear the teacher, the policeman, the government official, or anyone else in authority. They will not even fear the bus driver. We will see this later.

It begins, I think in our society today, this lack of teaching begins with the parent wanting his child to be his buddy or pal—treating the child as his equal.

I have got news for you if you think that your child is an equal. He is not. Even in our society, our secular society, we do not treat children as equals, not until they reach the age of majority. So, we should not be treating them as equals when they are under our care before they have matured, before they have reached that age of maturity, or majority.

They are our responsibility. They are under our care.

So, until they reach that point of majority and are out of our hand, until we give them over to themselves to take care of themselves, we, the parents, are in the position of God to them.

Just as we are not equal to God in any respect, so our children are not equal to us. The only way that they are equal to us is that they are human too. But, it is very plain from Scripture that God gave the authority over them to the parents.

It is important that we keep that distinction. Parents are more to their children than the children are to them. God gave the parents a great deal of latitude, and a great deal of responsibility. But, the parents, are chief in the family.

So, respect, to someone who is the chief is absolutely necessary. I want to highlight this a little bit from the book of Proverbs. I want you to notice the similarity with the 5th commandment:

Proverbs 9:10-11 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.

Does that sound in any way like the 5th commandment?—"Honor your father, and your mother, so that your days might be long upon the land which the Lord is giving you."

It says here that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it is by that that our days will be multiplied. I want you to understand the parallelism that is going on here.

The fear of the Lord in a spiritual sense is parallel to honor your father and your mother. It works the same way. And, it has the same rewards: Long life is what he is talking

about here.

The fear of the Lord is the spiritual equivalent of honoring one's father and mother. It is only with the proper fear of the Lord that we are able to learn to obey Him. Is that not true? If we do not respect God, if we do not have any reverence for Him, if we do not have that fear that disobeying Him is going to bring consequences, what are we going to do? We are not going to do what He says!

Our human nature is going to say, "Aw come on! He's not noticing! He's got that galaxy or something over there that He's running. It's not going to matter! And besides, God doesn't reach down here very often and throw lightning bolts and such! He'll just pass this one off!"

But no! If you have the fear of the Lord you know that God is watching you! And that He is marking all these things down, and then we will have to give an account to Him for everything that we do. So that gives us a bit of impetus to say, "Ok, God. I won't do this because you have said in your word that this is a sin. This will displease you."

The same thing happens in a physical sense with children and their parents.

If a child is taught to respect his parents, given a very easily followed set of instructions because they are clear, and they are consistently followed up with punishments by the parents, then the child, when he is tempted by something that would be against those standards, will say, "No! My mommy or daddy won't allow me to do that!"

It is the same thing. It is the fear of the Lord, the fear of the parent. It is very necessary for the child to be taught this at a very early age.

Look! A dog understands the fear of its master. And it respects its master.

Our dog is named Sydney. We got her when she was 10 weeks old. She did not weigh more than about 12 pounds. But, when we brought her home, we made something absolutely clear. She was not supposed to leave the tile in our foyer/kitchen/breakfast area. She tested us maybe twice. We told her, "Sydney, NO!" We made her understand that the carpet was off limits. And she learned it. She was able after two times to very quickly understand the fear of her masters. We did not beat her. But, it did not take much to instill in her the idea that we were in charge, and we were the responsible party, and if she would step across that line, she would get it.

Now, all it takes for us is to say, "Sydney, off the carpet!", or "Get off!" or "You know

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you're not supposed to be there!" All she might put there is her paw, or so, and that is as far as she is tempted.

But, she is a dog. Your kids are smarter than a dog! You tell your child what it is that you want them to do, and then you enforce it by not allowing them to do what it is that they want to do, and making them do what you have told them you want them to do. And then, you continue to follow that.

If there is ever an abrogation of that, you pounce until they learn not to test you on that. And that is that!

They have learned to honor their father and mother. But, if we do not do those things, if we do not have the standards, if we do not follow it consistently, if we do not punish for transgression, they are not going to learn it! Do not think that just because they are human that they are going to say, "Wow! These are my parents! I think that I'll follow everything that they say!" It does not work that way. If you do not teach it to them, they will not do it.

We have got the example of millions of children out there who were never taught to honor their father and mother. We are seeing the results. It is a very simple principle.

God has given us the example by telling us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and if you have it, you will live a long time. And then, He says the same thing in the physical parallel, "Honor your father and mother so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord shall give you."

That is the lesson.

Look at chapter 14 verses 26 and 27. It is very similar. I am just giving it to you as a backup to the last scripture. Solomon writes:

Proverbs 14:26-27 In the fear of the LORD *there is* strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.

Do you understand the things that he is saying here in terms of children and parents?

He is saying that if you teach your children to fear their parents, and honor them, that you provide for them confidence because they know the boundaries in which they can

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live; they have a refuge because they know that they can run back to the safety of that standard, back to the safety of the parents that love them; and thus avoid the things that would happen out there if they went against that standard. And it says, "It gives them a fountain of life."

Just like the commandment says, it prolongs their life—it keeps them out of danger. It makes them careful. It keeps them from accidents, from stupid actions that they might do—foolishness. That it is why it is so vital that we teach children to honor us, and respect us as parents, because it is for their own good. It is going to keep them until they are able to live on their own.

It is going to make sure that they make it to their own maturity so that they can begin the process all over again with their own children. It is a safeguard for the perpetuation of the human race.

I want you to see, in Proverbs 30, a very vivid example from Solomon of what happens when we do not teach the fear of the Lord, or the fear of the parent. This is what happens when we allow the fifth commandment to fall by the wayside. It starts right here in verse 11:

Proverbs 30:11-14 There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. [This is the subject. What follows is what happens.] There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

This is what happens to a society when the fifth commandment is not followed—when we do not teach them to honor their fathers and mothers.

Proverbs 30:12 There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness.

What he says here is that if we do not follow the fifth commandment the result will be children who are unable to tell right from wrong. That is what it means. They are pure in their own eyes. But, they are not washed from their own filthiness. They cannot tell you what purity is versus filthiness.

So, what do they do?

They make their own standards, and they end up being hypocrites, and self-justified, meaning I will do what I want to do; and they will make excuses.

They are self-righteous which means that they set their own standards. The righteousness that they have comes from themselves. "This is what I consider righteous, and what I consider unrighteous." But, it has maybe nothing to do with what God might consider righteous or unrighteous. It is just their own standards.

Solomon is quite picturesque here. He says in terms of setting their own standards, he says, "These standards are excrement." That is what the word "filthiness" is.

He says that this generation is pure in its own eyes, and it is not washed from its own excrement. They are like babies who cannot wipe themselves. They have no experience or understanding whatsoever.

So, one commentator, either Keil or Delitzsch, who calls this "wicked blindness to one's judgment of themselves." They consider themselves oh so pure, when they are oh so filthy. They are wickedly blind to what they are.

What it all ends up being is they have no standards, or their standards are so twisted that there is no resemblance to anything we would consider to be moral in them. So, no standards, or twisted standards.

Proverbs 30:13 There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.

The result of this is children who are proud, vain, arrogant, and haughty. Especially, this thing about lifting up their eyelids. It is like putting that one eyebrow up—the Rock (American actor) look. Have you ever seen him turn around and lift up that one eyebrow? That is the haughty look that the Bible is talking about here. "Who are you? I'm not going to listen to you! I am what I am. You just shove off," is the impression that you get out of this.

They have the "I am just as good or better than you" mentality. They are not willing to trust their elders; in fact, they consider what anyone else does or says to be absolute rubbish, because they know better. "Don't tell me what to do!" That is their motto. They are, what we would call today, the "Me Generation." "I am everything. Do what I say, or

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get out of my way." That is the way they are taught, because they did not learn the fear of their parents. They were never taught to be under or to be submissive to anyone. They were never taught to be obedient. So, why should they? They have all the self esteem in the world!

That is what our society teaches, self esteem, not self restraint, not self abasement, or humility—treating others better than themselves, which is what the Bible teaches.

Proverbs 30:14 There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

Now, this one produces children who are insatiably covetous to the point of violence. They have no respect for others. They did not have it for their parents, so why should they give it to anyone else? Therefore, if these people are not worthy of respect, they are not worthy of the things that they do have. So, why should I not take them? Why should I not have what he has? He is just a poor beggar. He does not need those Nike's, or whatever.

Everybody is beneath his contempt, and so he has no restraint in taking whatever he wants. Insatiably covetous to the point of violence. Property means nothing to them. Ownership means nothing to them.

We used to teach children to stay out of other people's yards. Those are not your yards. You stay out of them. If you wish to go into that yard, you first ask permission. You walk up the driveway, go up the walk, and you ring the doorbell, and you ask.

Kids are not taught to do that anymore. The whole neighborhood is their domain. We have to put fences up to keep the kids out anymore. Not that we necessarily want to, but if they use our backyard as a shortcut to the next cul-de-sac, we do not want that. But, it does not matter to them. The whole world is their oyster. They believe that everything is theirs, and that they have no responsibility to anyone else. If they find something on the street, "finders keepers, losers weepers," rather than trying to find out whose it was, and try to give it back.

"Ah, the poor sot will not miss it anyway!"

That is their attitude, and as Solomon says here, they are willing to go to extremes of violence to get what they want.

Now, I do not need to remind you of people dying for basketball shoes. You have probably heard about some story like that. People being shot for something that they owned. "People whose teeth are like swords," it says, "and fangs like knives." They want things so badly, but they have no restraint, so that they are willing to go to the ultimate to get it.

Obviously, this is an extreme, but what Solomon is doing here is showing a progression that first starts with things like being unable to determine right from wrong, and then it escalates to being so proud, vain, and arrogant that nobody else matters. Then it gets to the point where violence, thievery, robbery, and murder becomes second nature, because they have no foundation to keep them from doing these things.

Things can escalate to this point very quickly. Sometimes in our inner cities we see this in things like gang violence where people are killed only for a pair of shoes, or the \$1.50 that was in their pocket.

These things are not unknown to us. We just do not want to think about them. But, this is the result, Solomon says, of not being taught to honor their parents.

The second area vital to strengthening the family is fidelity between the man and his wife. God created the institution of marriage as a team endeavor. It takes two to tango, as it were. It is a partnership in which the two members trust and rely on each other to get the job done because in many respects, the job just cannot be done by one. It is difficult to be a single parent and produce what God wants to be produced.

For one thing, you are missing the other sex in the responsibility department. That means that all the responsibility falls on the one parent, whichever sex they are. So, he has to be mommy and daddy. Or she has to be daddy and mommy. She is not equipped to do that. He is not equipped to do that.

There are cases in which it somehow worked. But, usually it worked because the single parent has some kind of help or backing from their extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. They help take up the slack.

But, what I am getting at is that God made the marriage relationship to be the perfect combination of male and female in positions of responsibility to bring up children in the way that God wanted to bring them up. So, you need both.

And what happens when you have infidelity is that the trust factor between these two disappears. Whether one tries to work on it or not, that infidelity, that disloyalty, that lack

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of trust is going to affect both the marriage and the family. Something is going to be missing.

The whole institution at that point either becomes badly damaged or, if a divorce occurs as a result, destroyed.

Now, when divorce happens, children usually end up bearing the brunt of the destruction. They are smaller, they do not have the defenses, they do not have the experience to really understand what is going on. So, they end up having the worst problems with it. They are the ones who never receive the benefit of two parents working together in faith, love, and trust to bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Something goes missing in all of that. Like I said, it can work. But, it takes a great deal more effort to get it done.

Unfortunately, when this happens (there are statistics to prove it, also), children grow up to repeat the mistakes of their parents. It is far more likely that children of divorced parents will be divorced later on in their own lives because they just did not have the examples in their own home to emulate.

And so, if they are going to have something work in their own marriages, they have to learn it pretty much on their own. You have to become convicted of doing it the right way, and it takes a great deal of effort to do it properly. It can be done, I am not saying it cannot be. But if we go back to the beginning, if the infidelity never took place, there would not be a problem.

Let us go to Malachi 2 and see just how seriously God treats infidelity. First He talks about it in terms of infidelity to Him. And then He goes on to talk about infidelity in marriage. You will see here what He is doing. He is making a parallel between the two, and saying both are just as serious.

Malachi 2:10-12 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned the LORD'S holy institution which He loves [marriage!]: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

This is what He starts with. Now, He gets into physical marriage between a man and his wife:

Malachi 2:13-16 And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, "For what reason [why]?" Because the LORD has been witness [He has noticed! He was the one that bound these two in the first place, and He has been keeping an eye on things.] 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."

Death is the penalty for breaking the marriage covenant. That was in verse 12, "May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware."

He is talking, first of all, about the covenant with Him. But, it is the same thought that ends up going into the covenant that one has with one's mate.

Both are covenants. The marriage covenant, and the covenant with God. And, fidelity is paramount to each one. Why have an agreement if you are not going to be faithful to it?

So, God says, "Watch out! Take heed to your spirit, and do not deal treacherously in your marriages!" It is very much alike to being treacherous under the covenant with Him.

Now, in verse 15, He gets to why infidelity and treachery to the marriage covenant is so terrible. He says that it messes with the children. He wants godly offspring. God makes us one in marriage, so that we can have godly offspring. Remember, at the very beginning He set up this institution so that we could have children, and multiply, and produce seed for Him. God wants our families to produce His children. His future sons and daughters in His image. And He gives us first crack at them, molding their characters to the point that He could then begin working with them.

But, divorce, infidelity, and treachery stalls the process, and it makes it all the much

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harder for God to work with them once they reach maturity. Sure, He can work with them, but He wants us to do the job that He gave us to do which is to make them ready for His calling. Is not that the name of the game? Bringing our children to the point where we are?

And then, we are to let God take it from there. We can see from verse 16 that God considers divorce to be a kind of violence. It rends the family in two, and it inflicts great harm on each member of the family. It is a kind of spiritual violence.

So, God says to take heed to your spirit that you do not do this. Make sure that you work on your marriages as it were, so that your children have the proper environment to mature in.

I just want to read Psalm 128 it to leave you with the idea of the blessings of strong families:

Psalm 128:1-6 Blessed is every one who fears the LOORD [see what it starts with?], who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LOORD. The LOORD bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

We cannot solve the family problems of society, but we can work to solve our own.

The family is a vital central institution, not just in the society, but in the church of God. Strong churches have strong families. It all begins with the fear of the Lord, and running our families His way.