

Abundant Life Lesson 8 - The Christian Family

Introduction

The family unit is severely under attack in today's society. The divorce rate is now over fifty percent, and children who come from homes with one father and one mother who are together are now the exceptions rather than the rule. Before God ever instituted a church or government, He instituted the family unit in the Garden of Eden. And before there was ever a church or government, Satan was trying to cause confusion within the family and tear it apart. Even today, the family is the place that the devil tries to destroy the most. He knows that a church is only as strong as the families that make it up. It is very clear then that all we have to do to see our homes destroyed is to do nothing. Gods' Word, however, gives us clear instruction on protecting and keeping our homes from the attacks of this world that would try to tear us apart.

God's Divine Order

There is a definite order in scripture for the home. If a home is to be as God designed it, then His order must be followed.

1. Jesus Christ - The head of the husband; the Lord of the family.
2. Husband - The head of the wife; chief authority over the children.
3. Wife - The "helpmeet" to the husband; secondary authority over the children.
4. Children - Respectfully obedient to parents; authority over no one.

Many people immediately think negative when the word "authority" is used. The word simply means "responsibility and leadership." If any of this divine order for the family is misplaced, problems and strife will result. For example, Jesus Christ is the highest authority of the family. If the husband makes decisions that are against the Word of God, then there will be severe problems within the home. Likewise, if the wife refuses to allow the husband to be the final authority of situations and constantly questions and undermines her husband, then confusion will be rampant. All of us probably know of a home where the children's will is priority and in such situations, not only is it unpleasant to be around the family, but eventually the children will rebel against any teaching that the parents try to convey. EVERY problem within the family unit will ALWAYS stem from someone not following the order given by God.

The Wife's Responsibilities

Let's begin by looking at the two most prominent scriptures which deal with marital responsibilities:

Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Eph 5:33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see

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that she respects her husband.

1 Peter 3:1-6 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

The duties of the wife can be summed up in two words: Submission and Respect.

1. Submission - "to yield humble and intelligent obedience to an ordained authority."

Submission is one of the most powerful and beautiful concepts in the New Testament. God does not hate women as some people think. He has commanded for them to be submissive to Him and their husbands because in doing so they will be blessed, fulfilled, productive, and spiritual. The choice to submit is the wife's decision that God has given to her. If she submits, He will bless her, if she chooses the opposite, then confusion and hurt will result.

2. Respect - "to defer to, to respect outwardly and inwardly."

The wife is to defer to her husband's ultimate decision and do so with body language that does not convey the opposite. Both Paul and Peter relate that the outward manifestation of the wife -- how she acts, dresses, and speaks -- are the most important sign of submission, reverence, or the lack thereof. A woman must refrain from "cutting down her husband to others" and constantly griping and complaining. Instead, she should put on the "imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" which to God is very precious.

God created women and men as distinctly different for a particular purpose: they are to complement each other and "complete" each other. Adam was not complete until he had Eve by his side, and vice versa. Our society pushes a "blending of the sexes" in dress, actions, roles, and almost everything else. The scriptures teach the exact opposite, that there is to be a distinctive difference in the sexes in every way. They are to work together to complete the marriage union and each other. Submission on the wife's part does not mean that she is not able to partake of the decision-making process, and if her husband fulfills his role as God planned, she will be able to complement the husband's responsibility. What submission means is that once all input has been received, and a final decision has to be made, that the wife goes along with and obeys whatever her husband decides. She does so through respect for him, and lifts him and his decision up. She does not verbally or physically vent her displeasure in an effort to tear him down or criticize him, but she wears a "gentle and quiet spirit." This does not mean that a woman

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cannot hold a leadership position in a church, in fact, throughout scripture we find women in leadership roles, even in the Apostolic churches. What it means is that the woman is to be the quiet input, not the complaining nag, within the marriage relationship.

Look back at I Peter 3:1. It gives definite guidelines for when a husband is not in church. The wife will win him by her "respectful and pure conduct" or "lifestyle of submission." If your husband is not in church, then you must submit in every area that you can and refuse to respond to him with revenge or spite.

Sometimes the wife *cannot* submit in a particular area because the husband's command contradicts God's commandments in scripture. If the husband demands that the woman wear ungodly clothing, go to sinful places, or act in such a way that contradicts scripture, then the wife does not have to submit *in that area*. She should submit in every other area, however, and the only reason that she does not have to submit in a particular area is when the husband has gone against his head, Jesus Christ.

The Husband's Responsibilities

The husband also has some definite responsibilities given in scripture:

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered

Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

A husband's scriptural responsibilities to his wife can also be summed up in two words: love and honor.

1. Love - in the Greek *agape*, which is generally used as "unselfish, sacrificial love."

Three times in Ephesians chapter 5, the man is commanded to "love" his wife, and he is to love her as Jesus Christ loves the church. Instead of blaming and pointing out the faults and sins of humanity, Jesus Christ came and selflessly died so that we could have eternal life and have things right with him. The husband is to love his wife in such a

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manner. Notice the following points about that kind of love.

To love his wife as Christ loves the church means that the husband should . . .

- be willing to continually forgive despite repeat failures and wrongdoing.
- not ridicule them when they have made a stupid mistake.
- not scorn them because of the emotional differences of females.
- stay faithful even when you don't "feel like it."
- be affectionate and respond to their needs even when you don't feel affectionate.
- be willing to choose the best course in the long run despite what the other person may desire at the time.
- show by example how to live, act, and worship.
- be as faithful to the will of God in our lives as Jesus Christ was when He walked this earth.
- be willing to sacrifice our fleshly desires in order to have a better relationship.

2. Honor - "to deem and treat as precious."

Wives are not the personal servants who are to slave over the personal whims of the husband. Submission does not mean that they have to jump at the husband's every beck and call. Some men treat their wives as precious as a maid whom they have hired to clean their house, and they get back very little submission and reverence. To quote one Christian counselor: "if there is a submission problem in the home, it can almost always be traced back to the man." Simply put, if the husband will truly love his wife as Christ loved the church and be the example that he should be, most women will have no problem with submitting to such a Godly example.

The husband must take care to treat his wife as something worth a great price.

Col 3:19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. A man who constantly criticizes his wife and puts down on his "old lady" will be rewarded with a lack of submission and reverence from her. Glance back up at I Peter 3:7. Peter warns that the husband's prayers will be hindered if he does not treat his wife tenderly and honor her as an "heir of the grace of life." This is an important principle to understand:

The authority over you will react to you and treat you the way that you treat those under you.

Glance back at the God-given order of the home on page 1 of this lesson. If the husband treats the woman with contempt, then his communication with his head, Jesus Christ, is hindered. Likewise, if a woman allows the kids to run over her authority, then her relationship with her husband will suffer. The husbands must show the wife how to submit through their example of submitting to Jesus Christ. Likewise, the wife must show the children how to properly submit by her example of submitting to her husband. When the children will not obey the wife and continually "mouth back" to her, then usually that is a byproduct of how the wife has responded to the husband's authority. If

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the wife refuses to listen to the decision and direction of the husband, then usually that is a reflection of how the man is responding to the commands and direction of Jesus Christ. But on the other hand, when the man submits to Jesus Christ and His Word completely and the wife chooses to submit to her husband's decisions, then the children will usually fall into line.

Children's Responsibilities

They are very simple: obey your parents, whether you like it or not.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

All children will test the limits of the authority set over them. They are simply seeing if the parents will stand firm and whether or not they are dependable. If a child learns that the parent does not mean what they say, then eventually they will not trust the parent in any area. Children are to honor their parents just as husbands are to honor their wives. There will be times that the child will not understand the discipline, but the parents must not waver, because they are actually earning the child's respect by "sticking to it."

Parent's responsibilities

Notice Ephesians 6:4 above. The fathers must especially realize their role in bringing up the children. The scriptures tell us to "train up a child (Proverbs 22:6)." That is, you must teach your children how to act and not to act, by not only your words but also your actions. Generally, children who have good role models as parents who are trying to draw closer to God and who are willing to spend time in "training" them will grow up to serve God and have peaceful homes and healthy relationships themselves. The child does not determine the course of the family or its actions. When they are allowed to dictate the family according to their desires, chaos is the result.

There will be times when the parents make a mistake in correcting the child. In those times, the parents should go to the child and apologize and admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Even a mistake can be an important tool to teach your children how to respond when they mess up and how to forgive. Some parents think that to admit that they "made a mistake" will cause their "authority" to be weakened. Actually, the child will respect you more for being honest and open than trying to be infallible when you are not. Your authority over your children is given by God and is not dependent upon your "performance" as a parent. God honors humility and repentance, even if it is from a parent to a child or vice versa.

True discipline of children should involve two factors:

1. Appropriate punishment for the offence.

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2. The child asking for forgiveness to the parent, those who were wronged, and to God.

Many times parents forget to teach their children the importance of repenting when corrected and they just assign a punishment without the children expressing their repentance. A child who is not repentant, should receive a harsher punishment for the offence than if they are genuinely sorry for what they have done and express those feelings.

Many of the problems with raising children seen today are evidenced by the modern opinion that raising kids is "women's work." In scripture, the father is commanded to take an active role in teaching and training the child:

Deut 6:6-7 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

In Ephesians 6:4, it is the FATHERS who are commanded to not "provoke a child to anger." In other words, "raise your children to follow a path of submission and love for God."

Prov 6:20-23 My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. 21 Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. 22 When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. 23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,

Notice that the commandment of the father is the "lamp" and the law of the mother is the "light." The lamp is the source of the light, and the light proceeds from the lamp just as the lamp has sent it out. The father is to be the source of the general commandment and the mother is to be the light, that reaches out and actually touches the day to day lives of the children.

For example, when there is a decision to be made about the children, then the parents should confer and each express their opinion until they come to an agreed conclusion. Then the father is to express the general decision and the mother is to ensure that the child takes the necessary steps to obey the decision. If the child refuses to obey the steps given by the mother, then the mother should discipline the child. If the child refuses the entire decision, then the father should administer discipline.

For a more specific example, say that the father and mother notice that the child's room needs to be cleaned. They talk it over and decided that the child cannot play until their room has been cleaned. The father should tell the child the general command, that is, "you need to clean up your room, and until you do, you cannot go out to play." The mother then must step in and be the "light" by revealing the steps that the child must take.

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She might say something like "okay, first gather all of your dirty clothes in a pile in the laundry room." "okay, next hang up all of those clothes that are on your bed and make it up." As the child completes each task, the mother should encourage them with positive reinforcement such as " you are almost there, now all that you have to do is pick up the toys and you can go." The father was the lamp and the mother was the light.

Severe problems would result in the above example, if say, the father gave the commandment and then the mother did not get involved leaving the child to feel as if he doesn't know where to start. Another thing that could bring problems is if the child refused to clean the room, and the father and mother gave in and allowed him to go play anyway. Another problem could arise if the mother cleaned the room for the child telling him "your daddy makes too many harsh demands..." Another problem might arise by the mother not submitting to the husband's decision and telling the child "your daddy is now at work, you don't have to clean your room." All of these scenarios that have been given confuse the relationship that God set up in place and will cause great confusion and heartache down the road of life.

We have a promise, though, that when we do things God's way, He WILL respond by blessing us. We will close with one final scripture:

Deut 7:26 And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.

We must protect our families and our homes from things that God hates and stands against. This scripture not only applies to physical things being brought into our houses, but attitudes and actions that we bring into our family structure. We must do things God's way in our homes, because if we do not, then we will be cursed. Satan will attack and do everything that he can to break down our family units because he wants us to be cursed by God. But if we will set up and conduct our families according to God's divine order and plan, then we can stand strong and experience God's blessings and power in our home for the rest of our life!