



QUEST LESSON F-12

FAMILY LIFE

The Problem: The problems facing family life in our modern society are increasingly intense. They are probably greater than at any other time in recorded history. Multitudes of people do not regard marriage as a sacred institution. It is thought quite acceptable socially and morally to live with a lover outside of the bonds of marriage and to change partners whenever it becomes emotionally, financially, or socially desirable. Sex is no longer reserved for the marital relation, but is entered into lightly as a legitimate means of cooling one's passions and satisfying one's desire for a high time.

The increasing disrespect for marriage as a permanently binding relationship is demonstrated by the growing number of one-parent families. Marriage is viewed as an open-ended contract which can be terminated at any time by either partner. When either husband or wife finds the spouse no longer tolerable, it is thought quite proper, in the interests of one's own peace of mind, to separate from him or her. The old fashioned practice of working through marriage problems, in the interests of preserving and improving upon that which is good in the relationship, is no longer regarded as psychologically healthy or emotionally viable. For the most trivial personality faults people are being rejected by their partners who imagine that they can get a better deal elsewhere. What God thinks about all this is not taken into consideration.

Jesus foretold the very state of things that we see today. He said: "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:38-39). The breakdown of family life and denigration of marriage as a divine institution are signs that our old world is about to come to its end.

Equally alarming is the growing rift between children and parents. In an age when pornographic entertainment is brought into the home with comparative ease, when moral and ethical mores of a degraded nature are constantly reinforced by the television set, is it any wonder that children and youth have little respect for their parents, or for the outmoded moral code propagated by conservative churches? Indiscriminate indulgence in sex, liquor, drugs, and the practice of vice and crime of every variety is very common among our children and youth. What were sophisticated problems for adults a few years ago are relatively commonplace for the young people of today.

The effect is the gradual disintegration of ordered society and the dethronement of the home and the church as spiritual, moral, and ethical guardians. Such a trend contributed in past ages to the collapse of great nations. Rome's loss of moral fiber contributed to the loss of its empire. Moral perversity in eighteenth-century France was a causative factor in the social and economic chaos at the time of the Revolution. No society that panders to immorality and lawlessness can survive for very long.

The Bible has the answer to the problem; an answer that has stood the test of time because it comes directly from the greatest Authority in the universe.

Objectives

First, we shall consider the kind of home established by God when He created our world.

Second, we take a look at the home backgrounds of a few great spiritual leaders.

Third, we study the Bible blueprint for a truly meaningful relationship between husband and wife.

Fourth, we note what the Bible teaches on the question of divorce.

Fifth, we shall consider what the Bible instructs regarding parent-child relationships.

I. The First Home Established

The home is the oldest institution on earth. It was established by the Creator Himself as a means of spiritual and emotional satisfaction for our first parents. It is very instructive to consider the magnificent ideal of home and family life established by God at the beginning of human history.

The Word

1. What kind of people were Adam and Eve as they came forth from the hand of the Creator? Genesis 1:27.
2. Why was Eve created? How was she created? Genesis 2:18; 21-22.
3. How did Adam regard his wife? Genesis 2:23-24.
4. What instruction did God give Adam and Eve? What kind of home did He give them? Genesis 1:28; 2:8.

Explanation: Adam and Eve were spiritually, intellectually, and physically perfect people placed in a flawless world. They had none of the evil biases that afflict humanity today, and none of the social, emotional, professional, and economic handicaps that trouble current families. As they came forth from the hand of their Creator, they were perfect replicas of His moral excellence. They had every advantage in the establishment of the ideal home.

Eve was created as a helper for Adam. This did not imply that she was in any way inferior to him. She had her role to play as queen of the home and mother of humanity. It was a role that he respected as equal in importance to his own, even though different. Eve did not attempt to usurp Adam's position, and he gave her full scope for the exercise of her own individuality. The distinctively masculine and feminine aspects of human existence were so perfectly manifested and sweetly balanced that homelife was a constant source of joy to both husband and wife.

Adam regarded Eve as an inseparable part of himself. He saw her as so united to him that, in fact, they comprised one being. The delightful paradox was that Eve was an entirely separate and distinctive personality. Yet she was an equal partner in a unity that we might call Adam-Eve. Without her he had not been complete. Without him she would lack an indispensable aspect of her being. Together they were a Godmade one capable of increasingly fulfilling the divine intention for their existence.

That intention involved reproduction of their perfection in a garden of loveliness and a world of glory.

Relevance: God gave man one wife. He wanted them, though different, to be equal partners in the marital union. Their happiness was found in union with Him and with one another. Their fulfillment came as they worked together to mold an ideal environment into an even more delightful perfection.

II. The Home Background Of Chosen Leaders

There are many examples in Scripture of great leaders prepared for their life work by godly parents and spiritual homes. Since the fall of our first parents into sin, the perfection of their Eden home has never been reproduced. Even so, there have been parents so devoted to the Lord that He has been able to use them to prepare their children to become great leaders in His cause.

The Word

5. In what kind of home did Moses spend his early years? Exodus 2:1-3, 9; Hebrews 11:23-25.
6. What sort of people were the parents of John the Baptist? Where did he spend his formative years? Luke 1:5-7, 24-25, 67-68, 76-77, 80.

7. What manner of people were the parents of Jesus? What is the record of his early life? Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 13:26-30; 2:51-52.

Explanation: Moses spent the most important years of his development with his own parents who were faithful worshipers of Jehovah. He learned to love God and His people before he was exposed to the evil influences of the Egyptian court. Imagine how concerned his mother, Jochebed, must have been to teach him the ways of God before the court of Pharaoh could inculcate the ways of Satan. Because of her careful training Moses never lost His love for the Lord and the special work to which he had been called. He chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" rather "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). As undoubtedly the greatest spiritual leader mentioned in the Old Testament, Moses could credit his nobility of character to the faithful foundation laid by a believing mother; and she was a humble slave.

The parents of John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elizabeth are simply described in Scripture as "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). No wonder that they should be chosen as the parents of the forerunner of Christ, and no wonder that the angel Gabriel could be sent from the very presence of God to commune with Zacharias (Luke 1:19). A good share of the success of John the Baptist in his great work for Christ must be credited to the influence in the home of his godly parents.

Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, were likewise in tune with the plan of heaven for their lives. God knew when He chose Mary to be the human mother of His Son that she was pure and holy because of her union with Him. Joseph complemented her dedication by his own relationship with God, and together they provided a truly spiritual home in which the Son of God could grow and develop in preparation for the greatest of all contributions to human need.

Relevance: Marital and domestic happiness are based on the relationship with God enjoyed by husband and wife. It is this heart union with the divine that qualifies them to train their children in the manner designed by heaven. The old Proverb that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" expresses a great truth. Men of great spiritual and moral stature are largely fashioned by parents whose lives are controlled by the God of the universe.

III. The Relationship Between Husband And Wife

The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the ingredients of happy marriage.

The Word

8. What is to be the husband's attitude to his wife? Ephesians 5:25-31; 1 Peter 3:7.
9. What is to be the wife's attitude to her husband? Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1.
10. What conjugal relationship is to exist between husband and wife? 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4.
11. What does the Bible teach on the question of the marriage of clergy? 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:5-6.

Explanation: If the Bible counsel is followed there is no danger of husbands becoming petty domestic dictators. They are instructed "to love their wives as their own bodies," "even as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:28, 25). No man who follows this counsel will treat his wife as a second-class citizen, or as an inferior. Peter underlines the point by instructing that husbands should give "honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). There is no suggestion here that the wife is an inferior. She is equally qualified with her husband to receive the grace of Christ. Her comparative weakness physically is offset by superiority in her own realm. Hence, she is to receive honor and love. The Bible instruction rules out male chauvinism. There are plenty of examples in Scripture of superior women chosen by God for leadership and prophetic roles.

The attitude a wife is to adopt to her husband is also carefully delineated in Scripture. She is to submit to him, "as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). Of course, this presupposes that he is functioning like the Lord. If he is fulfilling the loving role required of husbands, it is not difficult for his wife to follow the Bible counsel. She is never instructed in Scripture to submit to a demonically controlled dictator. "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (verse 23). Christ regards the church as His own body, and he commands husbands to treat their wives as their

own bodies. Only as a husband applies that instruction can he be the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. Christ does not selfishly and arbitrarily command and drive the church. He loves, leads, protects, provides. So are husbands to do for their wives. And wives are to honor and respect them as the church honors and respects Christ. The analogy between the husband and Christ does not imply that husbands are to be worshiped. Worship belongs only to Christ. The analogy applies only to those aspects of Christ's relationship with the church which involve His tender, loving leadership role.

The sexual relationship between husband and wife is urged and extolled in the Bible. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). Sex is a divine gift that is specifically intended to enrich the lives of married people. "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," the Bible writer adds. Sex outside of the marriage relationship is obnoxious to God and will result in the withdrawal of His blessing. Within marriage, however, it is unwise not to foster the conjugal relationship. Paul's inspired counsel makes a great deal of sense: "Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5 RSV). Even so, the Bible never condones licentiousness within marriage. Sex is an expression of true love. If it degenerates into a mere satisfaction of human passion, without the love motive being paramount, it loses its significance and humans lower themselves to the level of the animals.

There is no suggestion in Scripture that clergy should remain celibate. Paul sees certain advantages in remaining unmarried, if a person has no need to marry (1 Corinthians 7), but his counsel is given to the whole church, not just to the clergy. Moreover, he makes it very clear that every man should have his own wife, and every wife her own husband (1 Corinthians 7:3). Since "marriage is honourable in all" (Hebrews 13:4), that includes the clergy. In fact, Paul instructed that bishops and deacons should be married men (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6)!

Relevance: The Bible counsel for the married is simple and comprehensive. When it is followed, married life is a thrilling experience, and home is a foretaste of heaven.

IV. The Bible Teaching On Divorce

The problem of broken marriages is an ever increasing one in our society. The Lord has given us in His Word clearly defined guidelines to be followed by those who are having marital problems.

The Word

12. What is the only circumstance that Jesus recognized as allowing a person to divorce a spouse? Matthew 5:31-32; compare 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12.
13. How was Jesus' teaching reiterated by the Apostle Paul? 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.
14. What should a person do who is married to a non-believer? 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.
15. What is God's attitude to polygamy? Deuteronomy 17:17; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:4-5.

Explanation: The only reason for divorce recognized by the Lord is "fornication" (KJV) or "unchastity" (RSV Matthew 5:32). The original Greek word is *porneia*. It refers to "every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse." (Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). Homosexual as well as heterosexual acts are included. The innocent party has the right to divorce the guilty one. Even so, the whole tenor of Jesus' teaching is towards forgiveness. Only when the guilty one continues unrepentantly in a life of infidelity is divorce consistent with the principles of the Gospel.

The Bible does not recognize divorce with remarriage on the grounds of personality and character incompatibility. If such a problem exists, it is permitted that a separation take place, but without remarriage. The instruction is: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

A person married to a non-believer should remain with him, unless the unbelieving partner wishes to depart. Such a separation is not reason for divorce, however. The principle still stands that immorality is the only reason that the Bible recognizes for divorce with remarriage.

Polygamy is condemned in Scripture. God gave man one wife, "and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus reiterated this teaching (Matthew 19:4-5), and left no excuse for polygamy. The fact that the Old Testament has many examples of polygamy, practiced by people who were otherwise children of God, in no way condones the practice by Christians today. God has always been remarkably merciful and tolerant with human weakness, and wonderfully forgiving of sin. But his ideal has always been that one man should be married to one woman, and that they two should comprise a marital unity.

Relevance: The Bible counsel rules out hasty, indiscriminate divorce. God's purpose is that married people should take their problems to Him and learn to live with one another's weaknesses. By His grace each partner can overcome those habits and practices that bring unhappiness to the other. Where the love of Christ reigns, there will be peace and harmony, despite inevitable human imperfection.

V. Parent-Child Relationships

The relationships between parents and children today are among the greatest social problems of our time. If the Bible message were accepted by both parents and children, these problems would vanish,

The Word

16. What is God's attitude to children? Psalm 127:3-4; Matthew 19:14.
17. How should parents treat their children?
 - a. 1 Timothy 5:8
 - b. Genesis 18:19
 - c. Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4
 - d. Colossians 3:21
 - e. Proverbs 31:26-28
 - f. Proverbs 13:24
18. What attitudes should children adopt to their parents?
 - a. Exodus 20:12
 - b. Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1-3
 - c. Proverbs 23:22
19. What is a very vital part of the last-day message? Malachi 4:5-6.

Explanation: God loves children and gives them to us as a sacred trust. Our responsibility is to love them, teach them the ways of the Lord, provide for them, and administer discipline in a Christ-like way when it is necessary. There is no warrant given in Scripture for the shocking child abuse that is very prevalent in our society. Children are people for whom Christ died, and He wants us to give them the warmth of our love and respect. We are to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in the great work of developing their characters and personalities. We should pray with our children daily, and lead them in the study of the Scriptures. "The family that prays together stays together." We should also play with our children. Parents who have fun with their children at the right time usually receive greater respect than those who neglect this aspect of life. At times stern discipline will be necessary. Children and youth need to know what is required of them. They need to understand the parameters beyond which they cannot go without incurring punishment.

The other side to the coin is that children are to honor their parents, and to obey them "in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1). No child has a responsibility to obey the evil demands of a godless parent. But obedience to parents, in so far as their requirements are consistent with God's law, is a very important Bible principle. Disobedience to parents is one of the main causes of the evils in our society today. A child or a youth who wishes to follow Jesus will copy what Jesus did. Luke records that He was "subject unto" His parents (Luke 2:51). No Christian child or youth will do otherwise. When the parents' requirements are carefully spelled out in accordance with the principles of the Word of God, there is every reason why they should be obeyed. For the youth this is an important part of being a follower of Jesus.

So often youth accept all that parents have to give without giving anything in return. They often forget to express love and appreciation. Parents have often given more than they could reasonably afford, and yet the youth have taken it all with very little grateful response. They are often long on receiving and short on giving. It really helps to tell your parents once in a while how much they mean to you, and how grateful you are for their efforts on your behalf.

Relevance: The principles given in Scripture are the basis of happy marriage and family life. Because God wants us to be very happy people, He teaches us how we can be. Are you willing to follow the guidelines for marriage given in the Bible? Are you willing to order your home in accordance with the principles of the Word of God? Are you willing to love and train your children as God instructs? If so, you will have a Christian home, a loving spouse, loyal and loving children, and a life of wonderful fulfillment.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The home is the oldest institution known to man.
 - b. If a man does not like the way his wife looks, he has the right to divorce her.
 - c. Sex is only for propagation of children.
 - d. Clergy should be married, according to the Bible.
2. Discuss: Suppose a man and his wife have just become Christians and church members. Their teenage children, who have not been brought up to believe as their parents now do, do not wish to follow their parents' religion. What should the parents do?