

Harvest Christian Fellowship
“Theology @ 9” Handout
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“The Family” - Facilitator: David Walker

THE FAMILY

THE CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD IS A SPIRITUAL UNIT

The family (i.e., the household, consisting of parents and children, with or without relatives, friends and servants in addition) is the oldest and most basic of human institutions. The Bible stresses its importance as a spiritual unit and a training ground for mature adult character.

Made in the Image of God

The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.

Our ability to relate to one another within the family is a product of being made in the Image of God – the depth of interpersonal harmony experienced in marriage and family as it functions according to God’s principles is an example of the harmony that we see within the triune God throughout Scripture.

Marriage

God created the covenant of marriage; thus, he alone defines what it is. His definition of one man and one woman, husband and wife for life, as one flesh, eliminates any alternatives.

Authority within the Family

The family has a built-in authority structure whereby the husband is leader to the wife and the parents are leaders to the children. All leadership is a form of ministry rather than of tyranny, and these domestic leadership roles must be fulfilled in love.

Colossians 3:18-21 - *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

1 Peter 3:1-7 - *Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.*

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

The fourth commandment requires the head of the house to lead his whole family in Sabbath-keeping; the fifth requires children to respect and submit to their parents

Exodus 20:8-12 - *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

Ephesians 6:1-3 - *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Jesus himself set an example in this (Luke 2:51). Later Jesus fiercely opposed supposed gestures of piety that were really evasions of responsibility toward parents (Mark 7:6-13), and his own last act before he died was to provide for his mother’s future (John 19:25-27).

Understanding authority and our unique roles within the family are vital for our fulfillment of God’s purposes. As we are made in the image of God – all are equal, yet have differing roles just as the triune God has different roles.

Training in the Family

The family is to be a community of teaching and learning about God and godliness.

Genesis 18:18-19 - *Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.*

Deuteronomy 4:9 - *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*

Deuteronomy 6:6-8 - *These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

Proverbs 22:6 - *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

Children must be instructed and must be encouraged to take the instruction seriously as a basis for their living.

Proverbs 1:8 - *Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

Proverbs 6:20 - *My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

Discipline, which means directive and corrective training, is necessary to lead children beyond childish folly to self-controlled wisdom.

Proverbs 13:24 - *Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.*

Proverbs 19:18 - *Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death.*

Proverbs 22:15 - *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.*

Proverbs 23:13-14 - *Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death.*

Proverbs 29:15-17 - *A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall. Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.*

Just as we grow in righteousness and holiness when we are disciplined by our heavenly father, so our children grow in obedience and righteousness when they are disciplined properly by their earthly fathers.

Hebrews 12:5-11 - *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,*

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The Family as a Spiritual Unit

The family is meant to function as a spiritual unit. For example, the Old Testament Passover was a family occasion.

Exodus 12:3 - *Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.*

Joshua was setting an example when he said, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). And households became the units of Christian commitment in New Testament times.

Acts 16:31-34 - *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.*

The New Testament makes frequent connections between the life of the family and the life of the church. Because of this connection, it is inevitable that leadership patterns in the family will reflect leadership patterns in the church, and vice versa. As Godly men fulfill their leadership responsibilities in the family, they should also fulfill leadership responsibilities in the church.

1 Timothy 3:4-5 - *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*

The fitness of candidates for church office (both Elders & Deacons) was assessed by observing whether they had led their family well.

Our family relationships teach us how to relate to the church and to individuals within the church. 1 Timothy 5:1-2. The concept of the church as God's family should give us a new perspective on the work of the church; it is "family work". Just as members of an earthly family often have times of joy and fellowship when they work together on a single project, so our times of working together in building up the church ought to be times of great joy and fellowship with one another.

The building of strong family life must always be a priority in our service of God.

*All of the foregoing material was taken from "Concise Theology" by J.I. Packer, Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem and Doctrine by Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshear