

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Christian Family Today: The Family - Current Issues

When I was asked to produce a broadcast on this subject, I felt completely inadequate to do so because family issues are always more complex than they seem to be on the surface. This needs to be remembered as we consider some of them. Nevertheless, in the time allowed, I will try to scratch the surface in relation to the Christian family and issues such as:

- Corporal Punishment,
- The Television and Internet,
- Domestic Abuse,
- Sex before Marriage,
- Homosexuality,
- Addictions,
- Apparent Infertility
- The Care of the Handicapped; and
- The Care of the Elderly.

Firstly, we'll take a look at **Corporal Punishment**. In the recent past, the media has headlined the fact that there are moves to extend the ban of corporal punishment (smacking) into family life. Should this become law then it would be one of those issues where the Christian obeys God rather than man because the scriptures indicate that corporal punishment is a God-given method of discipline. In Ephesians 6:4, the apostle Paul gives the balance for discipline: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The force of the word "nurture" is "chastening" which may include the broad education of a child through word or reproof as in 1 Timothy 1:20 and 2 Timothy 2:25; by the infliction of sanctions or calamities as in 1 Corinthians 11:32; 2 Corinthians 6:9; and Hebrews 12:6-10; or with blows as with a scourge as in Luke 23:16 and 22 and Proverbs 23:13.

Each of these has its place in child training. In fact, thinking back to my own children, there were occasions when they were under six years old when they were smacked; but after that the incidence of smacking was very rare with a word of correction usually being enough. The correct use of discipline in the formative years is essential if the child is not to be spoiled. If discipline does not take place during those years, then don't totally blame the child for its rebellion in later years (Proverbs 29:15).

There are those, even Christians, who would not use corporal punishment as a method of disciplining their children. That is a choice that should be respected. However, some would go so far as to say that corporal punishment is "Barbaric". By so saying, they are indirectly accusing God of being barbaric. Why? Because, through the Spirit of God, Solomon wrote: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (See Proverbs 13:24 and Proverbs 23:12-14). Here the use of corporal punishment is linked with love because love always seeks the best for the good of its object. If a child is wayward, then this is one God-appointed way in which love can act in order to correct him. In Hebrews 12:5-11, the policy of God in disciplining Christians, His own children, is outlined. First and foremost, the aim of the discipline is that Christians might live godly lives. Second, the motivation behind the discipline is love. That is to say, God knows what is best for His children and seeks to lead them in that way. Thirdly, discipline exercised in love will lead ultimately to joy if the subject is exercised by it. However, at the same time, God indicates that discipline may be abused. For example, He says that natural fathers may use discipline unwisely according to their own judgment. That is, to relieve their own stress in the situation rather than for the beneficial correction of the child. Nonetheless, notice that God is prepared to use the equivalent of a scourge on His own when necessary (Hebrews 12:6).

Secondly, we'll move on to consider the **Television and the Internet**. In the early twentieth century, John Logie Baird was to change the world with his invention of the television. Like most inventions of men, the television could be used for good or evil. It has become one of the most forceful mediums for changing our society because it gives information by both auditory and visual means. This has an amazing hold over people, so much so that TV has been labelled as the "plug-in drug." It is used as a force for good in many of its education programmes; but sadly, the screens also bring into our homes worldly entertainment, increasing vulgarity, disgusting language, violence, explicit immorality and an unhealthy occupation with occult practices as writers and producers seek to extend the boundaries

of the acceptance of these in society. Those things listed in Romans 1 concerning the worst in men are today portrayed on our screens with little or no censorship. But know this, it ends in judgment! Verse 28 and the last verse of that chapter says that those who are involved in these things are “reprobates” worthy of death, but so are those who have pleasure in them that do them, namely, the audience.

In contrast, we have the things that Christians ought to be thinking about in Philippians 4:8: “...Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” If we test our TV viewing by the standards of Philippians 4 then we’ll probably find that it will be greatly reduced - or even eliminated altogether.

Christians are encouraged, by the scriptures, to live out their lives wisely, redeeming the time because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16). This means that we should sacrificially buy back time for those things which are honourable in life. It would be more beneficial to engage in more active forms of recreation - like taking a genuine interest in family activities. Furthermore, it is vital that the family altar is maintained in Christian homes. The old saying that “families which pray together stay together” remains true. So let us make time for a regular family reading of the Bible and for prayer. This is easy to say, but difficult to practise because Satan will do all he can to keep us from these things. He knows that Christians can defeat him through the power of God’s word and that prayer is the lever that moves the arm of God against him.

Equally dangerous to our families is the Internet. Again, it needs to be said that it is used to promote a good deal that is pure and educational; but it is riddled with dangers. Newsgroups, forums and chat rooms can lead our youngsters into undesirable discussions and even into arranging blind dates that are dosed with danger. Viruses and/or Trojans are placed on the “Net” by selfish people who are often out to prove a point, deceive or ensnare. These items also allow strangers to access your personal computer data or destroy it. Furthermore, there is now a growing curiosity about paganism and witchcraft which is fuelled by an abuse of the Internet, and pornography is readily available to young and old alike. The latter leads to an acceptance of images of women and men in compromising positions that are a gross violation of human dignity and intimacy. Such images feed base, sinful nature of mankind. The Son of God said, “You have heard it said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). This principle may be applied to all lust. Another item that seems to be given a measure of acceptance by the media is homosexuality. Scripture describes the practice of homosexuality as “against nature” and “unseemly” whether it be among men or women (Romans 1:26-27). The active practise of homosexuality would be classed under the broad term of “fornication” in 1 Corinthians 5:11. Therefore, if one who is a Christian is practising homosexuality then fellow believers are advised to follow the directions given in that verse. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us to: “...Honour God with your body”.

Thirdly, there is the question of the attitude of **Christians to Sex before Marriage**. Our government, through television, actively advertises contraception for “safe” sex. It does this in order to reduce unwanted pregnancies and restrain disease. The message being given to our young is it’s alright to have sex as long as you’re careful. The Christian message, however, is to remain pure until you are married. I’ll repeat that: the Christian message is to remain pure until you are married. God is clearly concerned about sexual purity as Deuteronomy 22:13-30 shows. Therefore, say an emphatic “No” to those who would seek to take advantage of you in the name of “love”. Real love means to put your date’s welfare, both short-term and long-term, above your own desires. To love is to both respect and protect (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

God intended sexual intimacy to be enjoyed between a man and a woman *in marriage*. God created Eve for Adam because Adam needed a mate complementary to him. He needed assistance, companionship and intimacy. So God chose marriage as a sacred and honourable relationship in which to meet those needs (Genesis 2:23-25). Second, Scripture commands us to avoid all forms of sexual immorality (Acts 15:29; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 6:13-18; Galatians 5:19, 1 Thessalonians 4:3). In the New Testament, Paul said that a believer is not to satisfy one’s burning passions before marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2, 8 and 9).

Nevertheless, we also recognise that this sex drive is one of the most difficult to control and unwanted pregnancies may occur even among true Christians. There is not the time here to go into the many scenarios which might result; but speaking generally, Christian parents, while not condoning their child’s actions, would need to give them all the support possible. The parents of the girl would inform both the father’s parents and meet with them to discuss matters. Hopefully, the father of the unborn child would do the honourable thing and marry her. The parents would also inform the church in order that those spiritual among them might undertake for the spiritual welfare and guidance of the pair (Galatians 6:1) and also advise other church members of the way in which they should act towards the couple. Abortion would not be an option in this case. In Psalm 139:12-17, we find that God is able to take the origin of a person further back than the womb. He who knows the end from the beginning knew every one of our members

before we were “knit” together in the womb. What was true of us was true of Christ. A body was prepared for Him by God. Think of the loss to this world had Christ been aborted shortly after His conception by the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, we turn to **the problem of Domestic Abuse**. Domestic abuse is a one-sided relationship where a spouse regularly seeks to control and punish his or her partner. In the main, abuse is directed from the husband toward the wife. It can take various forms: verbal, physical, psychological, sexual, and financial. So what are the options open to the Christian wife if she is abused by her Christian husband? Firstly, there is the option of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22). However, if things become unbearable, then the kind of confrontation as listed in the process of Matthew 18:15-17 may be appropriate. If this fails to produce positive results then the wife may need to separate (1 Corinthians 7:0-11). The only case in which Scripture allows divorce for a Christian is in the case of fornication (Matthew 5:31-32). So the Christian wife may separate from her husband for her own safety or sanity, but recognise that this is always with a view to ultimately coming back together if at all possible.

Fifthly, there is the issue of **Addictions**. Drugs, alcohol and smoking, among others, have one thing in common - they can be addictive. Even though scientists who study the brain are able to trace the channels and processes which lead to addiction, they are still some way from dispelling the problem. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, we find the apostle Paul's attitude to personal freedom: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Despite his freedom as a Christian, Paul indicates that there are some things which are just not suitable or fitting for him to do and he would not be engaged in anything that would make him a slave. Alcoholics, drug addicts and regular smokers are all enslaved by their addictions. Furthermore, each have destructive effects on the human body which is, for the Christian, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

If you are Christian and believe that you are being controlled by any of these things and want to be freed, then admit this to God telling Him that you don't have the power to deal with it alone (1 John 1:9). Ask Him to deal with it. Then admit the problem to those close to you. They may become more understanding of related problems such as mood swings and get advice on how to deal with you during the bad times. Also inform your doctor who will be able to give you advice and point you in the direction of more professional organisations which are able to deal more effectively with the problem. The church that you may attend will probably need to take disciplinary action of some sort, but those who are spiritual will certainly be able to help you and your family through arranging prayer and practical support where possible. They may also be able to help you avoid situations where drink, drugs and tobacco would be a temptation.

Sixthly, we'll look into **Apparent Infertility**. I have the privilege to know a married Christian couple who have been blessed with one child; but have been trying unsuccessfully to have another. On the surface, everything seems to be fine medically and they have tried to implement the advice of the experts in the course of their normal sexual relationship - but to no avail. So what were they to do next? Do they reach out for methods of fertilisation which are more impersonal or do they wait upon the Lord's time? In this instance, they decided to continue to pray about it believing that, should it be God's will, then in His good time, He would provide. It is a real dilemma because we know that the main purpose for marriage is the procreation of children (Genesis 1:28). It is God's will that married couples have children. Nevertheless, He, for His own reasons, may “close up” a womb. Are we able to give Him thanks for so doing realising that He knows what is best for us? As Romans 8:28 states, “And we know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Yes, the seemingly bad things that happen to us are also working out for our ultimate good. May God grant us the faith and grace to realise this. You may be in a similar circumstance. It is very difficult to advise you as to a course to follow, but I suggest, firstly, that you might show your submission to God's will by thanking Him for the situation. Secondly, study the subject in the Bible. For example, look at the lives of Hannah (1 Samuel 1 and 2), Sarah (Genesis 16 and 17), Rachel (Genesis 29 and 30) and Elisabeth (Luke 1). All things are possible with God. Thirdly, ask Him to lead you in the course to follow and to prevent you from making one step outside of His will. Fourthly, do not worry so much that you become depressed. It's easy for outsiders to say, but difficult to do when you're in such a situation. Nonetheless, we are told to cast all our burdens upon God who cares so much for us (1 Peter 5:7). Finally, consider other legitimate options such as adoption. There are many youngsters out there who are in need of loving parents or carers. It may be that God has earmarked one or more for you.

Seventhly, we'll consider **the Care of the Handicapped**. Handicap may be the result of a variety of reasons such as an accident, a difficult birth or abnormal development in the womb. Either way, it dramatically changes the lifestyles of the parents. The extra burden of care borne by the families of children with severe handicaps is both heart-rending, long-term and costly.

Family members found in these situations need financial support, time out, holidays, knowledge of help lines, baby-sitters and someone to talk to. The elders of modern day churches need to have the knowledge and organisational abilities to enable church members to support parents with these needs. At the same time, those handicapped need to be shown the sort of loving kindness that David showed to Mephibosheth who was lame on both his feet (2 Samuel 9).

Finally, there is the **Care of the Elderly**. There is a Christian couple I know who, some years ago, undertook the care of the husband's mother by taking her into their own home while she was quite well. Slowly, this elderly woman began to lose her memory and was found doing silly but dangerous things. So much so that she couldn't be left alone. So her daughter-in-law ceased work and cared for her. This immediately placed a financial burden on the family, but they were just about able to manage. Over the years, the mother-in-law became so unmanageable and was causing so much distress and stress-related illnesses in the family that she was placed in a home for the elderly. At present, she is in a nursing home and doesn't recognise her own son. Even in this situation they are doing their best for her - so fulfilling the Scripture that instructs us to honour our father and our mother. Yet, this Christian family seems to feel some guilt that they were unable to cope with her care. How important it is that reassurance and support is given to them wherever possible, especially where there are no other relatives who can do so. As Christians, we are to bear one another's burdens even as our Lord did (compare Isaiah 53:4 and Galatians 6:2). May we be given the grace to do so.

It is a fact that life expectancy in our own country is growing, so the need for help and support for an increasing number of elderly in the community will also grow. Recognising this as a general problem, our churches should be examining ways in which they can play a positive role in meeting some of these needs. After all, the Lord Jesus encourages us to look out for the poor (Mark 14:7) and to do good to all men (Galatians 6:10).

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