

STANDARD C - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PART OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Lesson 6: What Is a Christian Family?

Introduction

When God created Adam, He did not leave Adam by himself. God created Eve, and together the two of them became parents and started a family. The stories of families are found throughout the Bible. The story of Abraham's family and his descendants make up much of the Old Testament. The New Testament opens with stories of the Holy Family—Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Christian around the world love the beautiful story of Jesus' birth. Instruction regarding Christian families are found throughout the New Testament. Since family plays such an important role in human life and society, it is important for us to understand the family in Christian terms. We begin with a strange command from Jesus.

A. Jesus Gave a Strange Command about the Family.

One time a large crowd was following Jesus. As the people followed Him, Jesus turned around and said something that seems very strange. He said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-26).

Why would Jesus tell His disciples to "hate" their family members? The fifth of the 10 Commandments tells us to honor our mother and father (Exodus 20:12). Jesus had parents who raised Him. Did He hate them? No. Luke tells us Jesus as a child was obedient to His mother and father. He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51-52).

Nothing in Jesus' life indicates He hated anyone, including His own family. In fact, there are tender scenes involving families showing Jesus' compassion and love. He had compassion on a widow whose son had died. To the broken-hearted and destitute mother, Jesus brought good news, and He raised the son from the dead (Luke 7:11-15). Jesus restored Jairus' daughter. She appeared to be dead. But Jesus took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Then Jesus told her parents to feed her (Luke 8:40-56). Jesus cast an evil spirit out a boy. He healed the child and gave him back to his father (Luke 9:37-43).

When Jesus was crucified on a cross, His mother was nearby, grieving for her Son. The New Testament says Jesus loved His mother (John 19:26). Even in His suffering, Jesus cared for His mother. As He was dying, Jesus turned to John and asked him to take His mother into his own home. Jesus asked John to treat Mary tenderly, as though she were John's own mother (John 19:26-27).

None of this sounds as though Christ hated families. There must be some deeper meaning to His words, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother . . .” (Luke 14:25-26).

Question: Why do think Jesus said if anyone comes to Him and does not hate father and mother, he or she cannot be His disciple?

Question: Can you name another time Jesus showed compassion for mothers, fathers, or children?

B. The Meaning of Jesus’ Strange Command.

In Jesus’ time, family relationships were very important. In fact, the extended family was often seen as more important than all other loyalties and relationships. Jesus was not telling His disciples they should hate their families. Jesus meant that to become His follower one must place worship of God above all other loyalties. Jesus recognized the importance of families. But He also stressed to His disciples the Kingdom of God must rule over even the good things. Every other loyalty takes second place to the reign of God. The Kingdom of God puts all other values in their places.

This is where Christians must begin in their understanding of the Christian family. Only when a family has Christ at its Lord can the family be truly Christian. In a family there can be many conflicting values that are opposed to the reign of God. Only when love for God is the controlling value can families achieve the purpose and order God intended. Sometimes family members make their own selfishness the highest value. Sometimes that happens to power and control. Even money and sexuality can fight to be the highest value in a home. All values must be governed by the supreme value: love for and worship of God. Then all of the other family values can take their rightful places.

Question: What did Jesus mean when He said to hate your family?

Question: What should be the one controlling value of a Christian home?

C. The Church is the “Bride” of Christ, and Christ Is Her “Husband.”

One of the most important pictures of a Christian home in the New Testament is in the Book of Ephesians. There, the apostle Paul says the relationship between a husband and wife should be like the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-24). A husband and wife should love each other in the way Christ and the Church love each other. Just as Christ gives undivided devotion to the Church, so a husband should give undivided devotion to his wife and family. Out of love, Christ works always for the well being, maturity, and growth of the Church. He does not attempt to make himself strong by making the Church weak. In the same way, a Christian husband and wife should work to strengthen each other. This is the model of Christian love that should be shown to children.

Christ has one bride, the Church. His love is undivided. Just so, a husband is to have one wife, who should receive her husband’s undivided love. The same is true for a wife with regard to her one husband. Marriage is an exclusive promise between a man and a woman

who love each other. They pledge to give themselves to each other in a love that excludes all other human competitors. That is one reason why adultery is sin. Adultery violates the covenant of exclusive love and attention a Christian marriage requires. A Christian marriage is most strong when a husband and wife realize their responsibility to each other is, first of all, a responsibility to Christ. In the presence of Christ, a husband is a steward of his wife. In the presence of Christ, a wife is a steward of her husband. Neither one belong to himself or herself. Both belong to Christ.

Question: Why should a man have only one wife? And why should a woman have only one husband?

Question: Why is adultery a sin?

D. The Responsibility of Christian Parents.

In one sense, the children of Christian parents belong to them. The parents are chiefly responsible for their children's care and well being. But in a more important way, the children belong to the Lord. Christian parents will recognize children are a gift of God. In the nurture of children, Christian parents will act as God's stewards. The Lord will guide parents as they care for their children. This will happen through praying, listening to the Scriptures, and participating in church. Parents and the Church share a major responsibility for nurturing children in the Christian faith.

The power and meaning of the Gospel must first shape our families. God's love that is shown to us in Jesus should characterize our homes. The New Testament will teach us how to do this. Many Christian teachers have provided additional help. Wise teachers in our churches also have much to contribute. Daily, parents should rely upon the Holy Spirit's guidance. Wisdom comes from God, not from within ourselves.

All of us have ideas about families that may not agree with the teachings of Jesus and with the New Testament. All of the values and practices we have inherited from others must be carefully examined according to the New Testament. All cultural and educational sources for instruction in parenting must be assessed and used according to Christian standards.

Question: To whom do children belong, their parents or God? Explain your answer.

Question: How should Christian parents differ from non-Christian parents?

E. The Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality.

In many cultures, human sexuality is not understood according to biblical values. Movies, television, magazines, popular culture, and other media abuse and distort human sexuality. It becomes cheap and vulgar. Human sexuality becomes a "sick" type of entertainment. Adults and youth are misled.

Christian homes should serve as a setting for teaching children the sacred character of human sexuality. Christian parents should teach children human sexuality achieves its

meaning only in the context of love and faithfulness. All forms of sexual intimacy that happen outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage are sinful. The practice of homosexuality is one example of how human sexuality can be distorted. Such abuses and misuses of human sexuality miss the goal God intended.

Christians should see human sexuality as an expression of the holiness and beauty God means for His creation to have. Human sexuality is one of the ways the marriage covenant between a husband and wife is sealed. In marriage alone God blesses and sanctifies human sexuality. It is a sign of the exclusive love and loyalty a husband and wife share. Human sexuality is a part of their much larger commitment to each other and to Christ.

Question: How should Christians view human sexuality?

Question: What is the role of parents in teaching human sexuality?

F. Christian Husbands and Wives Should Be Servants of One Another.

Jesus' disciples seemed to argue quite often over who was the most important among them. Sometimes they seemed to be more concerned about their own interests than about listening to Jesus. They seemed to think gaining power and control over each other was what the Kingdom of God was all about. Clearly, in that mood they would never correctly represent Jesus as His followers.

One day the disciples were arguing again. Jesus knew the thoughts of their sinful hearts. Then He did something quite surprising. He took a little child and placed the child in the middle of the disciples. Jesus said they didn't yet clearly understand what it meant to be in the Kingdom of God. So He explained. Life in the Kingdom has nothing to do with grasping for and gaining power over other people. He went on to say, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me," (Luke 9:46-48). A child in Jesus' day had no social or political power. A child was the least of all persons. Jesus compared himself to a child. He said unless a person can recognize that He did not come to seize worldly power and position, then he or she cannot receive Him. Plainly, the disciples did not fully understand. Full understanding would come later. Jesus told them the "least among all you all—he [or she] is the greatest" (Luke 9:48).

The home and the Church are the most important settings for putting Jesus' instructions into practice. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their parenting practices. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their sexual relations with each other. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their whole marriage. Christ did not first seek to enrich or serve himself, but gave himself to the Church. In the same way, parents must model for children what it means to seek first the best for others in the family. A mean-spirited, violent, and self-serving parent can never model Jesus the Master who washed the feet of His disciples and dried them with a towel. The Holy Spirit can help us be models of Christ to our spouses and children.

Question: How did Jesus Christ model being a servant?

Question: How can Christian parents model servanthood for their children or other people?

Conclusion

In a Christian home, a wife and husband will have no interest in controlling each other. In a truly Christian home, Christ is the model of all relationships. Power is used in mutual service and love. A husband and wife become servants of one another.

In a Christian home, other family members are not obstacles to overcome. Children are not tools for selfish parents. And parents are not tools for selfish children. In a Christian home, leadership means service for the good of the family. Greatness is not seized or demanded. It is achieved through the quality of one's love and service. This requires respect for all family members. If members of a family will live this way, then the Kingdom of God will come to and reign in that home.

Activity: Think about your home and marriage. What can you do to make your home and marriage more like Christ? Discuss this with your teacher or pastor.

Activity: Plan an activity in which you show you are a Christian servant to your spouse.

Activity: Do something special for one of your children or a child you know.