

Sermon follow-up

8/16/09

Rich Lusk

Sermon Notes p. 14-15

Books to read on marriage and parenting include:

- *Sacred Marriage and Sacred Parenting* by Gary Thomas, which focus on family as the context in which God enables us to grow in grace; Thomas shows that our spouses and children are used by God to shape our character
- *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper, which is now perhaps my favorite book, page for page, on marriage, surpassing Christopher's Ash's *Sex in the Service of God* and Doug Wilson's *For a Glory and a Covering*; my only significant caveat is that I do not agree with Piper's minority position on divorce/remarriage
- Robert Farrar Capon's *Bed and Board*
- Bryan Chapel's *Each for the Other*.

On the early church's ambivalence about marriage and family life, as well as defense of the goodness of marriage/sex/family, see Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, ch. 1, ch. 11, p. 230f.

Thomas's book wrestles with the question: What if God designed marriage more for holiness than happiness? What if marriage is actually a spiritual discipline for saints-in-training, analogous to the disciplines/vows that monks and nuns live under? In other words, what if family life is not *an alternative* to pursuing God (as many in the early church suggested), but instead *a way* of pursuing God (as the Reformers and Puritans suggested)? What if loving our spouses (and children) is a chief way in which we express love for God? What if marriage is the gymnasium in which we work out our sanctification? What if your spouse's failures are actually a disguised blessing to you, in that they provide opportunities for you to grow in grace? What if the point is (ideally) not just becoming a holy spouse but a holy couple – that is, growing in holiness together, sharpening and maturing one another, each enabling the other to become what God calls them to be?

Marriage can be great for your growth in holiness. After all, there is nothing like home life to make you face some pretty significant character issues. Marriage magnifies faults and exposes us for what we are the way few other things can do.

(See Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, ch. 6; ch. 13 contains a lot of wisdom on the estate of marriage by Francis De Sales.) If marriage was just about immediate thrills, we'd have to exchange spouses every few years; the fact that it is a lifetime covenant bond forces us to deal with some things about ourselves that we might rather not have revealed. As Thomas says, we have to come to see that marriage is primarily about God changing *me*, not me changing my spouse. Marriage is penultimate, not ultimate; our relationship with God outlives our marriages, so that undoubtedly has to be the focus, even in marriage. All too often we expect too much from our marriages, demanding from our spouses what only God can give. Situating marriage within my mission to grow in grace and serve God in the world puts it on much better footing.

Thomas says we must learn to have contempt for contempt. We must learn to keep showing love even when it hurts. We must not focus on getting what we are owed in marriage, but on giving what we have to offer. If we do not see our marriages in light of the gospel, we take a consumer based approach to the relationship, adding up the pluses and minuses (no doubt, exaggerating our pluses and our spouse's minuses), deciding whether or not it's "worth it" based on a cost/benefit analysis. (Have you ever found yourself thinking that your spouse was not worthy of you?) But real love does not operate on that kind of mechanism. We have to remember that we are fallen people, living in a broken world. We will disappoint and be disappointed by our spouses. We will lack the time, energy, and motivation to do all we should or could do. But a marriage based on grace endures because it is about much more than self-fulfillment.

If marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, then simply "sticking it out" is of great value because it points to the eternal covenant bond Jesus has with his bride. If Christian spouses do not stick it out, then our marriages contradict our message (which is, after all, a declaration of reconciliation). The symbolism of marriage should be a great enough incentive for Christian couples to endure with one another to the end. (See Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, ch. 2.). Rather than asking, "Did I marry the right person?" energy is better spent learning to live with the one you have married (and thus becoming the right person yourself!). Marriage is an arena in which I learn to serve (Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, ch. 10) and suffer faithfully (Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, ch. 7-9).

Married men should see a huge part of their task as making their wives feel happy, loved and secure. Men, you will find your life when you lose it in sacrificial love for your bride. The key to getting your own needs/desires met is

to give your all in meeting the needs/desires of your spouse. You will get no more out of your marriage than you are willing to put into it.

Marriage brings many hardships. See Thomas ch. 7-8. We must see that marriage is both gift and task. Marriage must be tied into the mission God has given us. See Thomas, ch. 13, esp. 262f on death and the purpose of marriage.

On godly sex, Thomas ch. 11, esp. 209f. We need to develop a spirituality of sex, understanding the manifold ways God uses sex to keep us together as a couple. Thomas makes an interesting point based on 1 Cor. 6. Paul says that if a Christian man has sex with a prostitute, he joins Christ to a prostitute. Our bodies are temples of the Spirit, so illicit sex defiles the house of God. But between the lines, Paul is making a truly profound point about marital sexuality. Men, your wife's body is a temple of the Spirit. As Thomas says, "Can a Christian [husband]...be drawn into God's presence in a unique way as he joins his body to his wife? Isn't he somehow entering God's temple – knocking on the door of *shekinah* glory when he joins himself to a fellow believer?" Again, Thomas: "When Paul tells us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), our contemplations on the significance of sex take on an entirely new meaning. What a woman is allowing inside her, what a man is willingly entering – in a Christian marriage, these are sanctified bodies; bodies in which God is present through his Holy Spirit; bodies coming together, celebrating, but in a spirit of reverence and holiness." When a Christian man has sex with his wife, he is entering the holy of holies, a temple where God's Spirit dwells. To enter her body is to enter sacred space. Sex is, quite obviously, physical – but it so much more. For a Christian couple it is also a quasi-sacramental, deeply Spiritual act, as well.

In 1 Peter 3, the apostle calls on Christian women to pursue a beauty that never goes out of style and never fades away. One billion years from now, it is a beauty that will still be shining brightly. Husbands, it is your job to encourage this beauty in your wives and to make sure your wife knows that, however much you cherish her physical beauty (you certainly should!), her beautiful, Sarai-like character is the ultimate attraction.

Some quotes:

Dan Allender and Tremper Longman:

Marriage requires a radical commitment to love our spouses as they are while longing for them to become what they are not yet. Every marriage moves toward enhancing one another's glory or toward degrading each other...

Our marriages are basic training for the one Marriage that will not disappoint.

T. S. Eliot:

Marriage is the greatest test in the world...it is a test of the whole character and affects every action.

Carl Whittaker:

It is in families we are broken and it is in families that we are healed.

Gary and Betsy Ricucci:

One of the best wedding gifts God gave you was a full length mirror called your spouse. Had there been a card attached, it would have said, "Here's to helping you discover what you're *really* like!"

Gary Thomas:

A good marriage is not something you find, it's something you work for. It takes struggle. You must crucify your selfishness. You must at times confront, and at other times confess. The practice of forgiveness is essential....

Christianity does not direct us to focus on *finding* the right person; it calls us to *become* the right person...

Marriage limits what we can do but it multiplies what we can become.

Otto Piper:

Marriage is, therefore, both a gift and a task to be accomplished.

James Whitehead:

In our marriage we tell the next generation what sex and marriage and fidelity look like to Christians. We are prophets, for better and for worse, of the future of Christian marriage.

Robert Capon on the absurdity of marriage:

Marriage is a paradox second only to life itself. That at the age of twenty or so, with little knowledge of each other and a dangerous overdose of self-confidence, two human beings should undertake to commit themselves for life – and that church and state should receive their vows with a straight face – all this is absurd indeed. And it is tolerable only if it is revealed in as such. A pox on all the neat little explanations as to why it is reasonable that two teenagers should be bound to each other until death. It is not reasonable. It happens to be true to life, but it remains absurd. Up with the absurdity of marriage then. And up with the marriage service. It is full of death and cast iron. And it is one of the great remaining sanity markers. The world is going mad because it has too many reasonable options, and not enough interest or nerve to choose anything for good. In such a world, the marriage service is not reasonable, but it is sane; which is quite another matter. The lunatic lives in a world of reason, and he goes mad without making sense; it is precisely paradox that keeps the rest of us sane. To be born, to love a woman, to cry at music, to catch a cold, to die – these are not excursions on the narrow road of logic; they are blind launchings on a trackless sea. They are not bargains, they are commitments, and for ordinary people, marriage is the very keel of their commitment, the largest piece of ballast in their small and storm-tossed boat.

Elton Trueblood:

[Family life] has no magic about it. The family can be the scene of wonderful affection and it can also be the scene of debasing friction. The family...is our fairest ideal, but it does not come without effort. Family solidarity takes hard work, much imagination, and constant self-criticism on the part of all the members of the sacred circle. A successful marriage is not one in which two people, beautifully matched, find each other and get along happily ever after because of this initial matching. It is instead a system by means of which persons who are sinful and contentious are so

caught by a dream bigger than themselves that they work throughout the years, in spite of repeated disappointment, to make the dream come true.

Anonymous:

If it was going to be easy to raise kids, it would not have started with something called labor.

On the demise of fatherhood

(<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2009/06/on-the-demise-of-fatherhood>):

Most fathers-to-be suppose that their old ego-centered lives will continue more or less unabated after the child arrives. With the exception of a few more obstacles and demands on their time, their involvement with their children is envisioned as being something manageable and marginal. Nothing like a complete transformation—an abrupt end to their former life—really enters men’s minds.

But then the onslaught begins, and a man begins to realize that these people, his wife and children, are literally and perhaps even intentionally killing his old self. All around him everything is changing, without any signs of ever reverting back to the way they used to be. Into the indefinite future, nearly every hour of his days threatens to be filled with activities that, as a single-person or even a childless husband, he never would have chosen. Due to the continual interruptions of sleep, he is always mildly fatigued; due to long-term financial concerns, he is cautious in spending, forsaking old consumer habits and personal indulgences; he finds his wife equally exhausted and preoccupied with the children; connections with former friends start to slip away; traveling with his children is like traveling third class in Bulgaria, to quote H.L. Mencken; and the changes go on and on. In short, he discovers, in a terrifying realization, what Dostoevsky proclaimed long ago: “[A]ctive love is a harsh and fearful reality compared with love in dreams.” Fatherhood is just not what he bargained for.

Yet, through the exhaustion, financial stress, screaming, and general chaos, there enters in at times, mysteriously and unexpectedly, deep contentment and gratitude. It is not the pleasure or amusement of high school or college but rather the honor and nobility of sacrifice and commitment, like that felt by a soldier. What happens to his children now

happens to him; his life, though awhirl with the trivial concerns of children, is more serious than it ever was before. Everything he does, from bringing home a paycheck to painting a bedroom, has a new end and, hence, a greater significance. The joys and sorrows of his children are now his joys and sorrows; the stakes of his life have risen. And if he is faithful to his calling, he might come to find that, against nearly all prior expectations, he never wants to return to the way things used to be.

On the anti-family (or “church as true family” theme in the NT) see Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 39ff, 44ff, 106ff. Lohfink explains why “fathers” are not mentioned in the things promised to those who gives fathers up in Mk. 10:29-30:

Brothers and sisters are blood relatives, the clan to which the Semite belongs and to which is accountable; they are also a source of protection. Behind *father and mother* stands the ancient patriarchal family, whose sacred structure is confirmed by Scripture. *Children* are both the Semite’s greatest joy and his social security, in a sense insurance for old age. *Fields* are the Israelites portion of the sacred heritage promised by God....

Jesus relativized all of this: clan, parents, children, land. It is possible, in some circumstances even necessary, to leave all this behind. This not done for the sake of renunciation, as if renunciation were something positive in itself, but rather because something new is appearing, the reign of God is arriving. Its arrival changes everything. Those who follow Jesus, who for the sake of the reign of God leave behind everything they have had, become a new family, a family in which, paradoxically, there are again brothers, sisters, mothers, and children....

Jesus promised those who followed him that they would at once find again what they had left behind: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields. But not fathers. Fathers are not included in the second half of the carefully constructed parallelism of Mark 10:29-30. is this fortuitous? The question would have to be left unanswered if other texts did not show that the absence of any references to fathers is anything but coincidence or forgetfulness.

Fathers are deliberately not mentioned in the second part of the saying because in the new family there are to be no “fathers.” They are too symbolic of patriarchal domination. Jesus’ community of disciples and together with it the true Israel are to have only a single father, the One in heaven. This is shown in Matt. 23:9.

Young ladies take note: If a man isn’t God-fearing/mature/obedient, a wedding ceremony is not going to magically transform him. Neither will becoming a biological fathering make him the blessed man of Psalm 128.

Psalm 128 + Eph 5:21ff reminds us that the true blessed man is Jesus himself. Psalm 128 actually hints at this because it is ultimately about more than just natural/biological families in verse 5, when the bride of YHWH, Zion/Jerusalem is brought into the picture.

Michael Pearl helpfully diagnoses the ills of the patriarchal movement in two articles on his “No Greater Joy” website. While I would differ with the Pearls on a number of familial/parental matters, on this topic, they’re very helpful. See <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/general-view/archive/2008/august/13/cloistered-homeschool-syndrome/>:

The Foger family came to stay with us one spring about 12 years ago while they were on furlough from Mozambique.

Their eighth child was soon to be delivered. Although I had just met the family, I was highly impressed by them. The oldest daughter, 19 years old, was a joyful, hardworking, energetic, blue-eyed beauty. The next, a 17 year old son, was cut in the mold of his father, dedicated, reserved, and very mission-minded. The five other children were 13 years old and younger. The family sang together with strong, forceful voices, no bashfulness among them. The two oldest children provided the instrumental accompaniment. It was an experience just listening to such a group.

They all understood and spoke two languages. The oldest two children spoke three languages. The father had left South America after ten years of mission service to move to another country, which meant learning

another language. The parents still stumbled around slowly learning the Portuguese language. The two oldest children were invaluable in the new ministry, which was already showing promise.

While we sat around one evening, the mother casually asked us to pray that their daughter find a husband before they left for Mozambique in the Fall. I asked in a shocked manner, "Why on earth would you want her to marry now? She is such a blessing to you and knows the language. Surely you need her to help you with the other children." The mother lifted her arched brows as she pondered how she would answer me. Her look conveyed her surprise at my lack of understanding. "We will be in a foreign country for the next 4 years. All that time she will be at the prime of her marriageable age. We feel it is best for her to marry an American. God called my husband to Mozambique as a missionary...not our adult children. We have obeyed God and raised them up to serve HIM...not US. We don't add; we multiply. It is time for her to live her life."

That next year we received a mission card with their picture. There were only six children in the picture. The mission letter briefly stated that the oldest son was in Bible school and the daughter was married.

Over the years I received their missions update. I noted that the parents were growing fatter and grayer. The children disappeared from the picture, one or two every year or so. It was sad to see the diminishing of such a magnificent family. The mission letters were filled with gospel film presentations to prisoners and villagers, church camps, protracted meetings, people getting saved, and only a brief mention of their now grown children. They would write something like, "Joshua and his wife are in Romania serving as missionaries; Peter and his wife are in Russia working with the something ministry; Sara married this year. Her husband is the pastor of a church." And so it went.

Today we receive mission letters from their now grown and ministering children. I see their families expanding. Their joyful, energetic, blue-eyed beauty of a daughter is now the mother of six children. Her family is growing up in Cajun country. I know if I meet them I will be very impressed. I heard that they sing like soldiers...with power and command.

I am thankful for the testimony of the Foger family as well as other families that have come into our lives. They are a prototype to help us understand the problems that are arising among some older homeschooling families. We call it by different names. Today it is the Cloistered Homeschooled Syndrome. Briefly, it is the failure of the parents to understand, appreciate, and respect the individuality of their adult

children. They sacrifice the individual identities of their children on the altar of their own emotional needs, making them nurse when they should be killing and dressing their own food, making them obey when they should be learning to command. They seem to think that grown children are God's gift to them rather than their gift to God. Through letters and personal contact, we see more and more of this cult-like isolationism, parents demanding absolute allegiance to the family group, and fearing outside contact might break up their "fellowship." Adult kids who want to launch out on their own are told that they are rebellious and disloyal and are causing grief to those who have nurtured them. Emotionally needy parents manipulate their grown children into remaining loyal to the unit. Thirty-year-old daughters sit at home acting as surrogate mothers, watching their prospects to ever be a mother dwindle.

You cannot stop a tree from growing without killing it or deforming it. Likewise, every year of one's life up until about the age of twenty-one or twenty-two is a year of radical change and development. Some parents are trying to stop that development, clinging to their teenagers like they were six years old. We have observed the victims many times. They either flee their chains in anger, or they are slowly smothered into inordinate submission, and their personalities die as they merge into the ego of their dependent parents.

This medieval hierarchy is preached as Bible doctrine. Father and Mother as King and Queen of their little kingdom preach the divine right of Kings and parents—"Obey me without question, for it is your manifest destiny." Their "patriarchal" status is the only expression of their significance in an otherwise disconnected world, and they milk it until their children are dry and lifeless in spirit, or until they fly away to breathe fresh air.

For over a year we have been discussing this subject, thinking about how to address it. We have talked with many young adults who are, or were, held captive, the rebellious and the subdued, those who are disciples of Christ and those who are worldly and lost. We have spoken with families who lost their children early, in their teens, and families who lost a child to the world in their twenties or later.

How did this happen? It is the old pendulum at work. Thirty to forty years ago Christian parents were losing their children to the world through public schools, public churches, and public play. The family was disconnected and dating was the norm. We rebelled against the soul eating monster and took charge of our lives. Our children would not be raised on the TV. They would not lose their virginity in a school bathroom or under the stairwell. No more evolutionary philosophy and godless

history and science. We took our children home and taught them from used books and the Bible. We created culture anew, abstaining from mega churches with their youth groups and revolving boy-girl relationships. We parents became the principle influence in our children's lives, selecting their friends and ours with care. No overnight sleeps or backyard playhouses with closing doors. Family worship and Bible study took the place of Television. Once again parents were in charge and there was hope.

It felt good to be in control of our own destiny, to not be a victim, to know that our children would escape the sin and shame that some of us had to go through before we came to Christ.

There was a vacuum, a need for leaders to arise and define what had become a movement, to clarify our journey and give us direction through uncharted waters. First, curriculum was written, then seminars. Sub-movements arose to flesh out the new culture, specialists addressing every conceivable issue—head coverings, dress, doctrine, spanking, scheduled nursing, Kosher foods and Jewish practices, and the list goes on. Books were written, some good, some not so good. Then someone pulled from ancient Chaldean and Sumerian culture, also practiced by Jews of that day as reflected in Scripture, a system of Patriarchal rule. It was the way nomadic clans were held together, a necessity of the times, but never taught by Moses, the prophets, or Christ as God's divine plan.

I laughed the first time I hear of the Patriarchal Movement. "It will never fly," I said, "People are not that gullible." But they were. Daddies who were never in charge of anything, maybe not even their wives, were finally given justification for assuming the throne. Yippee!

It is now become a disease of epic proportions. We call them PDFs, Patriarchal Dysfunctional Families. The children are treated as permanent property of the parents. If they don't marry, and many of them never have the opportunity, they remain at home as a sort of indentured servant, never rising to the status of an adult, always under authority of the head of the clan, the Patriarch Daddy. Don't snicker. A lot of kids are hurting. And if you want to see something scary, try to conduct a betrothal with two patriarchal mothers involved. It is ugggggly.

Daughter sits at home serving the younger children and doing Mama's chores—waiting for God's choice. Daddy and Mama hold their merchandise guardedly, waiting for a buyer who never comes.

What is pitiful is the whole process is done in hopes of getting the perfect will of God, but one vital ingredient is missing—encouraging your children to become responsible, autonomous, well educated, and

experienced adults as soon as possible. You should have trained your sons to be men by the time they are fifteen, independent by the time they are eighteen. Your daughters should be capable of living apart from the family by the time they are eighteen and should be allowed to make their own life's decisions somewhere between the ages of eighteen and twenty. Unmarried, grown (18 years old) children may remain at home; it is good if they do; but the parent-child relationship should evolve into an adult-adult relationship by the time they are sixteen to eighteen years old. Parents should have earned the right to give advice, and kids should have grown in wisdom enough to ask for it. But a parent should never invoke his parental authority on a grown kid. It is demeaning to both and akin to not being potty trained.

To teach a student to drive or fly a plane and then always make him be in the company of his parents is degrading. You teach them so they can become independent of you. Whose need is being met when a Father treats a 22-year-old girl like a child, dictating the parameters of her choices?

The glory of a parent is to work himself out of a job, to stand back and see his kids fly solo. I expected to have supplanted myself by the time my kids were eighteen. And so it was. Long before that, I began to confer with them adult to adult. I have stepped back and allowed them to make decisions that I knew were not the best choices, and sometimes I was wrong; they were wiser than I.

Space does not allow us to say more at this time. More will come later. Sit down and talk with your nearly grown kids. Ask them what they want, feel, aspire to. Don't express hurt, and don't emotionally manipulate them. Encourage them to pursue their dreams and support them in their effort.

In 1996, our daughter Rebekah Joy, then a 20-year-old in training to be a linguist, wrote this poem. At the time, the poem was the future; it was full of promise and hope.

*There is a mighty army
Being trained to stand and fight.
A Battlefield of soldiers
Learning what is right.
A Company of warriors
That will boldly take the Word
To every tribe and nation*

*Til every soul has heard.
There is a mighty army,
I've seen them everywhere.
Most are wearing diapers
And dragging Teddy Bears.
Infants in the training
Drilled in right and wrong.
Mom and Dad are making
Soldiers brave and strong.
There is a mighty army
Trained in righteous war.
Cheer them on to victory,
Children of the Lord!*

At 22 years old, Rebekah went into a remote mountain range of Papua New Guinea to study the language of a tribe who had never even seen a white person. Her 19-year-old brother, Gabriel, went for a few months, then was replaced by Nathan, her 17-year-old brother. Nathan stayed for a few months until he believed that she would be safe. She was left alone on that mountain with the unreached tribe. After two years, others came to help, and she came home.

It was her understanding of languages that gave us the information needed to pass on to veteran missionary Tom Gaudet. He is a publisher of Bibles into obscure languages. He sent out an appeal on the web for any translator that might have been working on a common language of that area. He received 14 replies. One was from a missionary who had spent 35 years translating the Bible, but when he went home he couldn't raise the money to get it printed. Tom pulled together all the translators, had them correct each other's work and settle on a finished manuscript. We raised the money to get 20,000 printed and shipped.

Sending a beautiful, unassertive, young woman is not God's usual way. He was proving a point. He was making a statement to her, to us and to you. "If I can protect and use this young girl to win a remote tribal people, then I can do the same for you."

Rebekah kept a diary of those years, which we read when she came home. We wept at her courage and resolve. We wept that we had the honor of being her parents. We published Rebekah's Diary in 1997. She was such a regular, normal girl until God gave her the vision of reaching a tribe. A few years ago, missionaries contacted us and told us that there are now seven strong villages of believers on that mountain and that the village men proudly carry their Bibles under their arms.

*Because a young girl went willingly...
Because we, HER PARENTS, didn't say no.
Because she would have obeyed us and stayed home.
But we cheered her on to victory...
There are new names written down in glory.*

And also from Pearl ([http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/child-training/teens/article-display/archive////patriarchal-dysfunctional-families-part-2/?tx_ttnews\[backPID\]=76](http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/child-training/teens/article-display/archive////patriarchal-dysfunctional-families-part-2/?tx_ttnews[backPID]=76)):

They plod on in blind faith trying to do better, but they blame their failure on their children...When things don't work out like the model they have been presented, they shut the door tighter against the world outside, not realizing that their failure... is actually a universal side effect of a very bad idea.

The response to our first article in this series has been phenomenal. The need was far greater than we imagined. The questions we've received have run in the same vein:

- Is the Patriarchal doctrine scriptural?
- What does the Bible mean when it commands us to honor our father and mother?
- What can I do to stop feeling guilty?
- How can I help my siblings escape their bondage?
- How can I help my parents overcome their bitterness and rejection?
- When and under what circumstances can I act contrary to my parents' wishes?

This article is quite long, largely because we have recorded portions of more than a dozen letters. If I tried to convey the ideas you will read in these letters, you would think I was overstating the facts. These letters speak volumes. I am convinced that this "Patriarchal" evil disguised as righteousness will be disposed of by simply dragging it into the light. The facts are too embarrassing and shameful for this pretense to continue. Many have continued to be faithful to their patriarchal precepts in spite of the many indications of failure, convincing themselves that their poor family experience is the exception. They plod on in blind faith trying to do better, but they blame their failure on their children, accusing them of worldliness and rebellion. When things don't work out like the model

they have been presented, they shut the door tighter against the world outside, not realizing that their failure is visible to the whole world, and is actually a universal side effect of a very bad idea.

There has been a sacred hush over the exalted doctrine of the patriarchal family. None dare question a system that stands for a recovery of Biblical values and promises to restore the family to a Christian culture. The headline is respectable and is innocent-sounding enough—Patriarchal Family. After all, doesn't the Bible tell us that the husband is the head of the woman and of his house and that children are to obey their parents?

I understand the motivation of the Patriarchal authors and purveyors. The crumbling of the Christian culture calls for radical solutions. The church is in desperate need to be reconstructed in accordance with the Word and the Spirit. The world seeps into our children like cold air into a log cabin in a Montana blizzard. Righteous parents are desperate for a solution. They looked for a scriptural means of correcting the problem, but believed a "Hath God said" partial truth—now clearly proven to be a lie.

The Patriarchal/Extended Family movement has been around long enough to demonstrate its bankruptcy. It is time to lay it aside and go back to the old-fashioned Holy Spirit-filled family—a family "in the world" ministering, but not "of the world." These true families are overcomers, not barricaded babies. They are militant godly witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not fearful, isolated survivors of an evil and intimidating culture.

A Physician's Perspective:

Dear Pearls,

As a family physician who sees many homeschool families in my office, I am fully aware of how much damage is being done to young women because of this "Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome." It started with good intentions, but has grown so far out of balance that these families are becoming dysfunctional.

80% of my patients are Christians, and a good majority of them are homeschoolers. I have worked with over twenty young ladies from 20 to 35 years of age who are so sheltered that they have no freedom to minister outside of their homes unless they work directly under their fathers. They have no freedom in Christ and must only associate with those who walk, talk, and look just as they do. To desire to be educated as an adult or to think on their own is forbidden. To have friends who do not belong to the "accepted group of believers" is unthinkable to the family.

This false teaching is creating a growing number of health problems in our young adult daughters in these homes, and also among the wives who are being forced to believe and teach these untruths to their children as truth. Satan is using this new Patriarchal teaching to destroy families in the Christian community everywhere. The effects of it is destroying believers' bodies due to extreme stress, and is taking them right out of their ministry to unbelievers, because they are too sick and are such a poor testimony to the world around them.

Please accept my gratitude for what you are doing, and please follow up on this important homeschool issue before more families are divided or destroyed.

Thanks for understanding.

Clip their wings.

Dear Mr. Pearl,

While homeschooling my own kids many years ago, we read an article that told about how certain ants secrete a hormone that prevents aphids from growing wings and flying away, allowing the ants to "farm" the aphids for the honeydew they produce. This is exactly what my parents did to us. We weren't just discouraged from exercising our wings and flying from the nest, we were prevented from growing wings at all!

I tend to believe that many of the Patriarchal families you speak of are really Matriarchal families. And if you think this is impossible, you have never experienced the power and mind control an extremely intelligent and manipulative mother can have over her (young) children's minds, and to some extent (though it may take years), over her husband. I don't know if she really controls my dad; I think he just gave up.

My 35-year-old (at the time) married sister once told me: "I won't cross the street without asking Mom and Dad for their permission!" And she was proud of this. You can imagine what her marriage is like. She has also copied my mom's manipulative tendencies and loves to cuddle up to my dad and "nurse" the wounds he suffers at the hands of my mother's controlling spirit.

When my mother, with my father's silent consent, tried to control her daughters-in-law and sons-in-law, they refused to submit, so mother treated them as unfaithful to the family, and expected the rest of the family to respond in kind.

We are expected to live our lives exactly as Mom and Dad ordain. We are to worship, think, believe, eat, work, and spend our leisure only with

their approval. I watched as my mom became worse and worse in her "Queenship," the older she got and the older her (once little) subjects became. The fruit of her control has been family infighting and divorce.

I wish I could say that I knew how to "handle" my mom (my family) and her ways, and that I had stuck around to try and witness to them, but I have no idea how to handle her (them). And I refused to sacrifice my wife and kids any longer while I tried.

So, I took my family and left. I have severed all contact with my parents and siblings. My parents have made it very clear to everyone how my family has hurt them terribly by this separation.

My siblings throw at me: "You are not honoring your parents, and they may die soon. You are not a Christian, because if you were, you would follow the program!"

Yup! This kind of bizarre stuff goes on! We need to wake up and say, "NO MORE!" And stop pretending this sickness is what God meant by "honoring parents"!

I do not regret leaving. However, I do regret that my parents do not get to be a part of their grandkids' lives, that my kids don't get to know their cousins, and that we miss out on extended-family get-togethers. All because of my mother's refusal to let go, my dad's refusal to be a man, and my siblings' terror over admitting any of this! And my not knowing what to do to make things better!

Thanks again, A freed man

Got it right.

Dear Mr. Pearl,

I am from a Patriarchal Dysfunctional Family, as you put it. At 25 years of age, I left my father's home along with two of my younger sisters. We praise the Lord for providing wise counselors and pastoral support as we made the decision to leave the home. My father was the head of his own church, so we had to find counsel and pastors to help us realize the error of these teachings. I know that without them, I would have probably turned my back on Christ. To this day, we still do not have a relationship with my parents since we will not "repent" of forsaking our parents' authority and leaving "their" roof. Even though we reach out in love to them, they will not allow us to have relationships with our younger siblings or have contact with them. Yet, all three of us attend strong Bible-believing churches and are actively involved in ministry.

In many ways, I have come to understand that my love for Christ must be stronger than love for mother or father. "If any man come to me, and

hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). I never thought this is what my life would be like, but my love for my Lord has grown so much deeper. I hope others come to realize how devastating the Patriarch Movement is. Because my family was an "idol" in the Patriarch Movement (especially in the Vision Forum arena), the pressure and rejection we received was very severe when we left.

Thank you so much for addressing this issue. I know so many families who could benefit from this article. May the Lord bless you all richly.

Better late than never.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Pearl,

This goes back to the question you asked in the article "Where are the Men?" Well, I became a man six years ago and eventually got out of Dodge! Thank you for your article. I needed that. Believe it or not, I still (occasionally) wrestle with guilt over leaving my family. My mom's influence is still hard to break at 40-some years of age! Actually, the sadness I feel is not over what I did, but over what our family misses as a result of this mess.

Fear.

Dear Mike & Debi,

I grew up in the worst of the cloistered dysfunctional families, and I can tell you the source of it is what God tells us we are not to have if we are His – FEAR. These parents FEAR too much. Just like the person who never leaves home for fear of being run over, these parents FEAR losing their kids. The parents believe they somehow are the only ones who know what is best for their maturing and adult children, and they thrive (literally) on their maturing and adult kids' attention, honor and obedience.

The children they have worked so hard to teach and train their way are now, as young adults, treated like ignorant and hopeless individuals. For them, God is considered powerless...even in the most conservative Christian circles.

Did it Right!

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Pearl,

I have just read your article, "Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome", and just want to stand on a chair and holler, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!! I am a homeschool product whose parents raised as an

individual, with an intricate part of our close family, but with unique giftings. By the age of 14, I was an equal with my mom and dad, helping to raise my five younger siblings, not as a slave, but as my mom's partner and "right hand woman." As her peer, I learned through her example wifehood and mothering. I was her buddy and friend, and she was my mentor and role model. My parents realized that I had a call for missions on my life, and I spent my childhood and teen years nurturing independence and life skills so that I would be prepared for when we would be parted. As I write this from my living room in India, where I have served with my husband as a missionary for three years, I can't help but feel grieved for those of my friends who just became an extension of their parents, or those who got fed up and left the fold. Either way, they never saw life with God as an adventure, because the only future they had was the one carefully crafted by their parents. Thank you again for your article. I pray that it serves as a wake-up call for parents before it is too late. God bless you!

—Rebekah

Dead Inside.

Dear Mike & Debi,

I am a 25-year-old girl in one of these Patriarchal Dysfunctional Families. God gave me verses like Matt.10:32-39 and Luke 14:25-35, and asked me to give my heart fully to Him. He is, after all, a jealous God. My parents want me to give my heart to my father, and to follow them. I love my parents, and I do not want to hurt them or seem ungrateful. I actually enjoy being at home still, but feel as though I will be a perpetual child if I remain there. More importantly, I know that the Lord is calling me out so I can follow Him. I'm not allowed to believe differently from my parents' beliefs. Up until now, I have never had to trust God or have faith in Him, because I was just to follow my parents. But the longer I and my siblings stay at home, the more we are finding out that although we have been given the whole world, we are losing our souls. We are feeling dead inside. Is there a way to remain at home, under our parents, and be alive? Am I still supposed to relate to my parents like a child, or do I follow Christ as an individual? I was always taught that God wouldn't speak to me unless He also spoke to my father and gave him peace. Anything else was attributed to the Devil leading me and wanting to break up our home. Where does headship come into all of this? I do still want to honor my father and have him be my head, but how? Can I move from home and be alive in Christ, or must I remain at home to stay in His will? I have not

been allowed to make a 'life' decision, and I would like my father's wisdom, but not his control.

No, my father doesn't know I'm writing to you. He doesn't agree with Michael Pearl, but agrees with Debi and the book, Created to Be His Helpmeet. He lets us get the No Greater Joy magazine, and each issue has an article that seems like you've been spying on our family by the way you address some issues. I just want answers so I can know my place. Thank you, if you can help me. I won't be offended if you tell me to stay under my father, or if you won't answer my questions without his ok.

What can I do?

I've already suggested counseling.

Dear Pearls,

I read your article, Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome. What do you do when your family is like this? What do you do when you are 23 and your father uses the word "submission" to control me, my mom, and my brothers and sisters? How does God want us to handle it? Is there any way to fix it, or does God want me to just wait for him to act? I've already suggested counseling, and they won't hear of it. Should I just pray? I'm at a loss.

Directionless.

Dear Mr. Pearl,

I am a 27-year-old single woman who read your article "Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome" with great interest. How could you know what had been swirling in my head the past month? These past year(s)? I'm still at home with my parents, my family of three siblings (one is married), and am honestly directionless. I was raised with the mindset that I would get married shortly after high school, but after that didn't happen, and I became 21 and 22, my parents kept feeding me that I just needed to stay home, be patient, and the right guy would come. When I was 25, I finally was given permission to branch out and serve full time in a ministry away from home. I loved it. I finally felt like I had something to love in my single years and knew this was where the Lord wanted me. But my parents called me home after 9 months. Since then, I have felt incapable of hearing from the Lord. I was 100% convinced that this was God's leading to work at this ministry, and I went with my dad's blessing (even though it wasn't his first choice). It doesn't seem right, I'm still considered a kid, and treated as incapable of making decisions. I'm being molded into what my parents want me to be, not what God may have for me, even if it is

completely different. It's incredibly frustrating. I don't want to live this way until I get married or, the rest of my life should God choose not to bless in that area. I don't want to be a rebellious daughter. I don't want to bring them heartache and sadness. But I do want to follow the Lord's leading—and what if that is different from their dreams? Can I do so and not be condemned?

How can parents learn to let go? How can adult children change their mindset so that they are not in rebellion to want to even think this way? Thank you for your time, and THANK YOU for your ministry.

A Reader

Angry Mother.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Pearl,

I am a very concerned and frustrated 23-year-old daughter. My family has been having difficulties for some time now. I am no longer willing to be passive in regard to my mother's control. She has poured her life into her children, and I am so very grateful for her, but when my brother went to work out of town, my mother had a nervous breakdown. She had to talk to him on the phone at least once a day and became completely distraught when he would only talk a few minutes, saying he had to get back to work. When my brother refused to promise that he would live at home until he was married, she considered this to be a breaking up of her family and wrote my brother an eight-page letter telling him how sinful he was.

This past summer, I felt God's call for me to go to Bible college. God has impressed on my heart that NOW is the time for me to prepare myself for a life of service with whomever God calls me to marry. Mother let me go for one semester. There are those in my life who think a girl is not to leave home until married and does not need education like a man. I love being a girl and a keeper at home, and I expect to be a wife, submissive to my husband, but I will never be a houseplant. The very way God has made me requires me to learn constantly, to be active, and to live for more. I have a passion for learning and an adventurous spirit.

My father and I are very close, and I get his advice and blessing in what I do. When I returned home from college, I talked to my father about what God was teaching me, and I told him that I felt God was calling me to a different path, and that I wanted to return to college, and I wanted his prayer. I was so struck by how blessed I was to have a father with whom I can have such discussions. He was very encouraging and gave me his blessing, telling me he had been feeling the same way.

Then I went to tell my mother, and as soon as I said, “I am praying about returning to college” she blew up in tears and anger. In short, she wants me to stay home, get married, have grandkids, and live next door so she can have a big “multigenerational family.” My mother says “a guy might not like a girl too educated,” but I don’t want to marry a man who is intimidated because his wife is intelligent and informed.

I am not sure how to deal with this. My mother tries to wear me down by talking about it every day for hours. Yesterday, I spent almost five hours listening to her. She told me that she thinks I don’t respect her because I usually talk to my father first about things like college and such. Well, the fact is that my mother doesn’t agree with my father on much and fights over everything. I am not very close to her, but I do go to her because of respect, even when I know she will go against me and against my father. She said I am rebellious and sinful. She will “not give her blessing for things she doesn’t agree with,” and I “will have to live with the consequences and pain of that.”

She is chronically depressed, upset, and often points out the spiritual fault of all of us in this family—including my father. She thinks she is more spiritual than he is.

She says I’ve crushed her dreams and essentially ruined her life. She “doesn’t like who I’ve become.” Truly, my heart is to respect and honor both my parents, and I try so very hard. My father says that with him, I am being submissive and respectful. My mother says I am not with her...I should trust her judgment because she is a woman, and my father doesn’t understand about girls as much.

It is difficult living in a home that is ripped apart daily by anger and tears. Most of all, I want to know how to act towards my mother. What does one do with two parents of different views? What more can I do to honor a mother with bitterness and constant conflict. She is very, very “spiritual” and will often cry and pray hours upon hours and read her Bible and always comes away with a message for us. The house is neglected, she doesn’t want to see other people, and will not do any other activities unless pushed. I’m worried about her. I think she is mentally sick and, though this seems radical, oppressed by the Devil. Both my brother and I feel that our home often has a spirit of conflict and that can only be resisted by God’s spirit of unity. I will continue to try to be kind and respectful in every way. My mother is incredibly insecure, so I will show her love with cards, notes, true words of encouragement, etc. Then, I will try to do something with her—a deliberate activity—once a week. I will pray for 1 Corinthians love. God has been with me for the past few

years with her depressions and blow-ups towards the family.

Nothing may change in my situation, but I need to live victoriously. I have been amazed at the joy, peace, and presence of God I have every day. I think my father is often shocked at the peace and quiet joy with which I carry myself...It is ONLY GOD's doing. He is preparing me, and everything He does is on purpose, so I am not bitter or trying to get out of a lesson He has for me.

I have specific questions. Where is my place as a daughter? What is my role before marriage? Where does what God is telling me come in? Even more, what can I do to help her out of her prison? Life has to be miserable for her living like this. She is so unhappy and always worried. Guilt makes me feel that I am sinful and cannot serve God with the gifts He has given.

I cannot tell you how delighted I was to discover your article on this subject. It will probably make my mother mad. And I know I am not the only one in such a place. Please write more on this subject. My mother really needs to read it.

Mother raises independents adults.

Dear Mr. Pearl,

I just finished reading the article called "Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome." Our oldest daughter (19 at that time; we have four more children age 7-12) left our little nest in May to serve at a Bible Camp in Minnesota. The temptation to hold on to her was really strong. Our mission statement of sorts for our family is: To raise strong intelligent, independent adults who desire to love and serve Jesus. If we held on, it seemed then we would not have been allowing God to work, not only in her life, but in ours also. She will be home for a short while this Winter, then she is planning to return to the camp next Spring/Summer. Your article truly hit home, and I love what you said that as parents, it is our job to work ourselves out of a job.

Rectified Misunderstanding...

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Pearl,

...is all I can say for your article on the Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome. In fact, it seems opposite of what most people "accuse" you of. I am most grateful that you have rectified this misunderstanding. We have had families in our church in the past who advocated exactly what you are writing AGAINST and saying that is how ALL TRUE Christian families should act. They say that Dad is the "high priest", grown daughters

should not show aptitude for anything, except perhaps midwifery or herbology, and should never venture out on their own (even at 20 or 30 years of age!). Single or widowed daughters must move right back home, because they are now again under their father's authority because they are without a husband, etc. etc. I have been trying for years to put my thoughts into words, and you said it exactly! Thank you!

Thirty but seems twelve.

Dear Mike & Debi,

Was I surprised! Your article hit home on the "cloistered family." My brother is 30 but seems 12. Until Dad's death last week, he made my brother live at home. While my dad lived, he NEVER let my brother get a job. He was simply there to do my dad's bidding. Now that my dad has passed, I have to figure out what to do with my brother. He is "mentally stable" but his social skills are pretty bad. Now I am trying to figure out what to do with him. I do not know where to start! I only wished my dad had your article to read 30 years ago. Seeing how Dad raised my brother helped me in seeing how not to raise my own children. Now, I TRULY LOVED MY DAD. But with his ways, he has put my brother and me down a road that seems to have no light at the moment. All because he was selfish. How do I get my brother to where he can take care of himself?

Stupid Guilt

Dear Mike & Debi,

A thousand thanks for your article, Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome. I was raised in a situation like the one you described. I have struggled with guilt for more than a decade over my decision to "fly away to breathe fresh air" against my father's wishes. By God's grace, I ended up marrying a wonderful Christian man and am continuing to follow after God, but I was left to my own devices with zero parental support for several years.

I'm in a reasonable relationship with my parents (Now that I'm married and in a new patriarchy, as they see it, they will talk to me.), but they still hold my leaving over my head, and I know they are waiting for an apology for the breach of their patriarchy. I know there is much to be gained from them even in our imperfect relationship, but I'm hoping that your article will speak to them and bring some peace to our whole family the way it has to me.

Thanks so much for sharing your insight.

My parents are in my brain.

Dear Mr. Pearl,

I just wanted to express my thanks for your recent article called, "Cloistered Homeschool Syndrome". In reading it, I saw it fit my family to a "T". My husband and I left my parents' jurisdiction, so to speak, about 5 months ago. We have a little boy almost 2 years old. We have struggled on a daily basis with many doubts and insecurities and continue to face negativity from my parents. It has been hard, knowing that the decisions we make are not according to my parents' beliefs. My parents are very much in the Patriarchal thinking, and it has damaged my family in many ways. I am the oldest of five children and have just now left at 33 years old. My brother (the youngest) left my parents in December last year, and my youngest sister just left about 2-3 months ago. My sister after me is turning 30 and is still at home. I worry about her, as she has a very private personality. She has gone through a lot, and I believe she has a tendency to depression. She invests her life in a couple of dogs, which I think is used as an escape, because they make her happy. I don't talk to my folks much because there is always a negative atmosphere or underlying attitude that is very hard for me to live with. I am not even in their presence, and yet I feel like my parents are in my brain. I fear what they think of me. I came to the understanding after I left my parents that I was using my mother as my Holy Spirit. I don't blame my parents, because I know that I make my own decisions, but when the LORD helped me see this, I just cried because I see where it has led me. I just want to be able to feel and experience the LORD working in my life and be led by his Spirit, but there is so much confusion...

MICHAEL RESPONDS

We have been inundated with letters like these testifying of dysfunctional families. The last time we had this strong of a response to an article was years ago when we first published the article "Jezebel". Reading your letters, we have come to see that the two issues are really one. Rather than speaking only of Patriarchal (ruled by men) dysfunctional families, we should also be speaking of the Matriarchal (ruled by women) dysfunctional families. It is a deadly combination. When a man adopts the doctrine of bringing his family under the umbrella of parental oversight, Jezebel, with her emotional need to be nursed beyond the toddler stage, seizes on the doctrine to justify and solidify her Matriarchal rule. Dad still needs a little nursing from time to time and doesn't want to sleep on the lonely side of the bed, so he goes along with it, pretending to be the authority. Not fully understanding

what is happening, he allows her to wield awesome power in his name, and will not speak his mind about how he really feels because he does not want to appear unspiritual.

And then, there are those families where Dad is the patriarchal head of his family and does not share the throne with his wife. His Patriarchal status readily turns to a monarchical rule. He jealously tightens his control until he squeezes the ambition and independence out of his children and his wife. Absolutism prevails.

Thirdly, there are those sincere families that just get caught up in the latest “Christian” trends. They desire the best for their kids and have no twisted emotional needs, no compulsion to be king and queen of an everlasting kingdom. They do hope to see their children marry and become independent, but the patriarchal system they have adopted has enslaved them as well as their children. The family is weak, maybe hurting, and their children are not maturing as they had hoped, and they are ready to see this sad movement in its true light. These articles will free them like the dove turned out of the dark and smelly ark after a year of confinement, having been tossed around on the waves of destruction.

Those with the King and Queen compulsions will defend their silly doctrine until the last kid leaves in bitterness or disgust. Those who are led by the Spirit of God will welcome the light of liberation and will throw off their own shackles and open their children’s cages.

Honour your father and mother.

Men and women ranging in age from 18 to 80 are asking, “What does it mean to honor my father and mother?” The Patriarchal movement has capitalized on the misperception that honor means obey. The Scriptures are clear, there is no age limit on honoring your parents. In Matthew 15, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for not honoring their parents. But nowhere in the entire Bible is honor synonymous with obedience, and nowhere does the Bible even suggest that an adult should obey his parents. It speaks quite to the contrary. Jesus said very plainly, “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:35–37).

The Bible viewed in its entirety—not cherry-picked—throws a lot of light on the subject of honor to parents.

Foundational Passages.

The word honor (honour) is found in the Bible 146 times. Following are the two Old Testament accounts of foundational passage on honoring your father and mother, and the New Testament reference and affirmation of the commandment.

Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Deuteronomy 5:16 Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Ephesians 6:2–3 Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

God promised the Jews that if they would honor their parents (no age limit), they would continue to live in the Promised Land, but if their society failed to honor parents, they would be cast out of the land.

What it means to honor.

Leviticus 19:32 Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.

1 Samuel 15:30–31 Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.

Honor is Respect Due to a Person
Based On Any Consideration.

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving 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.

If honor implies obedience, or conformity to the will of the other, then a husband is to obey his wife.

Honor all men.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

1 Corinthians 12:23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

1 Peter 2:17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

We know we are not to obey all men, but we are told to honor all men, so honor and obey are not synonymous. If honor were to equate with obedience, Samuel could not have honored Saul with his presence at the sacrifice.

Inappropriate honor.

Proverbs 26:1 As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.

Proverbs 26:8 As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool. [It will come back and hit you in the head.]

Ecclesiastes 10:1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. [An otherwise honorable person who commits folly stinks.]

“Honour to whom honour,” but no honor toward a fool, even if it is a parent. You honor your parents as the ones who gave you life and dedicated one fourth of their lives to nurturing you, but you shouldn’t lie and cheapen honor by being blind. A grown woman who honors a father who molested her and has never repented and sought restitution, that woman is binding a stone in a sling and flinging it with a certainty of it returning and hitting her in the head.

Jesus on honoring your father and mother.

Mark 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall

be free.

12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;

13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

Jesus gives us a clear example of what it means to honor your parents. He was speaking to grown men in positions of spiritual leadership who found a loophole in the Jewish law which permitted them to abdicate their responsibility to care for their aging parents. They took their savings and, as it were, put it in an account labeled: "Dedicated to God." Having done that, they couldn't access it to spend on their needy parents. No doubt after the parents were dead, the money would be transferred to a retirement account for themselves.

Not honoring is:

- Cursing parents (Matthew 15:4).
- Withholding financial support (Matthew 15:5).
- Not doing for them when they are in need (Mark 7:12).

There is no mention of descendants obeying their parents—never.

Honor is:

- Being kindly affectionate (Romans 12:10).
- Seeking the good of the other (Romans 12:10—"preferring one another").
- Respecting the office or position of a person (Romans 13:7).
- Bestowing more honor than their level of gifts suggest (1 Corinthians 12:23).

Bottom Line.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, [Those being brought up—Ephesians 6:4] obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

2 Honour [Obedience and honor are separate issues.] thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)

3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. [Children, the ones who are to obey their parents, are being brought up—not yet adults.]

5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters [Parents are not masters; they are mentors, and children are not servants.] according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

Obedience and honor are separate issues.

We know this to be true because:

- The words are spelled differently.
- They are never used interchangeably.
- The context in which they are used demonstrates a clear distinction.
- A distinction is made the only time the two words appear in close proximity.

(Ephesians 6:1–5). Children who are being brought up are to obey their parents (6:1). All are to honor their fathers and mothers (6:2). And servants are to be obedient to their masters (6:5). Different words, different meanings, different applications. It is all in the Word of God, but kept carefully separated and distinct from each other.

1 Peter 2:13–14 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

The language used here when commanding us to submit to government is conspicuously absent in those passages addressing the honoring of one's parents.

What Age?

What is the age at which a person stops being a child who is to obey and becomes an adult who assumes responsibility for his own life?

We don't need to guess. The Bible is clear.

Exodus 30:14 (38:26; Leviticus 27:3) Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.

Numbers 1:3 From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies. Numbers 14:29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

A Jew was counted as one year old when he was born, and became two years old when he commenced his second year, at the beginning of his thirteenth month of life. The way we reckon age, on one's nineteenth

birthday he is reckoned to be an adult, responsible for himself.

There is much more that needs to be said, which we will address in subsequent issues. Send your questions or comments. Feel free to challenge what I have said. I learn more from sincere challenges than from flattery.

Husbands/fathers must learn to pour themselves into their families. Too many men pour themselves into everything but family. But the blessed man of Psalm 128 gives himself to his family. He sees marriage as not only a spiritual discipline but a form of mission, a way in which he serves God in the world.

On raising small children: You're bigger than they are so you can make them obey if you really want to. But nurture is much more than that teaching bare obedience; it is not just civilizing children, not just keeping them from embarrassing you, but shaping their hearts so that they fear God and walk in his way.

Peter Leithart's comments on Psalm 128, connecting it to the Lord's Supper:

The Psalm is structured in two panels. Each begins with a reference to fear of Yahweh (vv. 1, 4), then continues to describe the blessing that comes on the one who fears Yahweh (vv. 2, 5a). Verse 3 begins with a reference to the man's fruitful wife, and verse 5b extends this to the bride of Yahweh, Jerusalem. And each section ends with a reference to children (v. 3b, 6a). The Psalm ends with a pronouncement of peace upon Israel.

But the Psalm ends not by talking about the family but by talking about Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel. The Psalm expands from the house of the man who fear Yahweh to the house of Yahweh – the temple house of Zion, the city-house of Jerusalem, and the national house of Israel.

The blessed home is a home within Israel, and the blessing that the Lord pours out on the home is a means for blessing Israel, just as membership in Israel is a means for the blessing of the family. The family does not redeem. It needs redemption. But being redeemed means being caught up in God's great act of redemption. Being saved is not a static state, but being swept up in the work of God. And so, by incorporation into the wider family of God, each individual family, fallen in itself, can become an agent for the redemption of creation. Each individual family can become an agent for bringing peace to Israel and to creation.

This is our ultimate hope, that the Lord of heaven and earth is not going to leave His creation to its own rebellion. He is going to redeem it. And the Bible describes this state of redeemed harmony as "peace."

That harmony is exemplified at this table. At this table, creation itself – grain and grapes transformed to bread and wine – is harmonized with humanity, as humanity is harmonized with God. This meal is a portrait of our ultimate hope, the ultimate hope for our families, the church for creation itself. This meal is a portrait of the Shalom toward which all creation is moving. It's a portrait of peace upon Israel.

John Piper's *Momentary Marriage*, ch. 1-3 are a good foundation for understanding marriage, especially that God is the creator of marriage. Ch. 4-5 deal with living together as faithful Christians in marriage. Ch. 6-8 deal with respective roles of husband and wife. Ch. 11-13 are a helpful discussion of marital sexuality and children. Ch. 14-15 deal with divorce.

The following quotation is from Joshua H. McIlvaine, "Covenant Education," from *The Princeton Review* (April 1861) 248-249, supplied by Joel Garver:

But there is one particular sectarian influence in the same direction which ought not to pass unnoticed here—the rise and rapid growth among us of the Baptist denomination, with their peculiar view of the relation of children to the Christian church. A similar conception also was deeply embedded, as its subsequent historical development has proved, in the principles of the Puritans, when they emigrated to this continent; and the great influence of New England has done much to extend it throughout

the country.

But strictly taken, it is a Baptist idea, and its consequences are most legitimately chargeable upon that denomination of Christians. For our Baptist brethren, strenuously denying the church membership of infants, that is to say, denying the covenant of Abraham as the true and final basis of Christianity, could not fail to lose the significance of the divine prescribed means, or instrumental agency, through which the blessing of that covenant must be realized. In their view, religious education and discipline could not remain a Divine ordinance, to which the promise of regeneration and salvation for their children was sealed by covenant engagements resting upon the faith of God. Whatever the education of children might be, they must still be regarded and treated, not as Christians, but as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," until they should come to years of moral accountability, should, on the evidence of regeneration, be introduced into the church by baptism.

The influence upon education of this sorrowful denial of the covenanted rights and privileges of children, has been, and still is, very great. For it has penetrated deeply into the ideas of almost all other branches of the church, until it may be said to predominate over their own original views. Even Presbyterians, in no inconsiderable numbers, have fallen away from the principles of our Confession of Faith, with respect to the children of the church, which are drawn purely out of the Abrahamic covenant; and are powerfully influenced, often without being aware of it, by Baptist ideas and tendencies.

Hence, instead of regarding and treating their children as presumably of the elect, instead of reckoning with covenant assurance upon the regenerating grace of God for them, and aiming thereupon to train them up in the way they should go to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they assume—a fearful responsibility!—that they are not in the church, not "in the way," not "in the nurture." How widely this view prevails among us, can be measured by the general currency of the expression, "to join the church," as applied to baptized children, when they come to their first communion.

Thus it is that religious education and discipline, the Divine ordinance, to which the promise of regeneration and salvation for the children of

believers is sealed by covenant engagements, resting upon the faith of God, and the great means prescribed by God for the realization of the covenant blessing, has been extensively supplanted by spasmodic efforts, in revivals and otherwise, to bring a sudden marked and sensible change of religious experience.

To obviate misunderstanding, it can hardly be necessary for us to state that we do not hold to the possibility of salvation for the children of believers, any more than for others, without that instantaneous change wrought in them by the Holy Spirit, which is commonly called regeneration; nor have we any sympathy with that view which ties this grace to the moment of time when baptism is administered. But we hold that this gift of grace is to be assumed as a covenant grant, by the faith of the parents.

To us it seems plain that the Pharisees never shut up the kingdom of heaven against their disciples more effectually, than we do against our children, whilst we harp upon the one string, that they cannot love their Saviour until they are regenerated and born again—images of spiritual things which it is impossible to explain to children—instead of teaching them to count upon God's covenanted work on their behalf, whilst we seek to win their hearts to Jesus by opening their minds with what manner of love he has first loved them. It does not lie within the scope of these remarks to exhibit the evils of the departure from the principles of our faith; otherwise it would be easy to show that it has borne the apples of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah in the American churches.

A TPC church member blogged these thoughts last time I preached from this text(<http://thesift.atlblogs.com/archives/016194.html>):

I wish every mother I know could have been with me at church the last few weeks. I have never been so encouraged, so admonished, so certain that my pastor must be reading my diary. Kidding. Honestly though, the sermons lately have been so overwhelmingly relevant to my life, to where I am right now, that it's spooky. He's been doing a series on the family, and of course, I've paid extra attention to the part about mothers/wives. And to be honest, I think I'd started to forget, or maybe I never fully

comprehended, just how important my job is. Just how vital and high a calling I have as a mother.

There is nothing more important, no greater deed to accomplish, than doing this job well. Wow. Let that one soak in. It doesn't mean that a woman can't excel in the professional world, because obviously we can. (Cause we rock.) But, the cost is too great if it means domestic failure. There is no more noble, valuable, respectable, honor-deserving job than the one I am doing right now. I don't have to prove myself in any other thing, I don't have to have the world's validation, I don't have to make a name for myself, I don't have to distinguish myself from my role of wife and mother. Am I more than that? Of course I am. But even what small thing I contribute to the world at large is still tiny in comparison to what I am building in these four walls. What is more consequential- being a few things to all people, or all things to a few people? I may write a book, that thousands of people read, and are affected by for an hour. But in comparison to the affect I have on the four lives of my children, which is twenty-four hours a day, every day, every month, every year... which is the greater contribution? Who do I impact more? Which one of these must I excel at, which depends on my success the most?

It doesn't mean I don't want to have more definition to my life than that of wife/mother-- I do. But it is the lesser need, the lesser calling. That's not a popular concept in our American culture. We're all about our individuality and self actualization, but that's not Biblical. We're to be servants, we're called to sacrifice, take up our cross. **"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"-- Mark 8:36.** I don't want to garner the world's favor, which is ever so brief and fickle, at the cost of God's eternal pleasure. Sometimes that means putting aside some personal pursuits, being selfless. And you know what-- that doesn't feel good. It wouldn't be sacrifice if it was giving up something that didn't matter. But that's what we're commanded to do. It's not that they are bad things - fishing isn't a bad thing, but Jesus commanded Simon and Andrew to leave it, and follow Him. Sometimes that's what it takes. Leave it, bury it, put it aside. And you will be honored for it, rewarded, if not in this present life, then most definitely in the next. Don't be so caught up in this moment and the daily sacrifice of motherhood that you can't see what comes after.

I don't know if you struggle with these kinds of things, but I'm willing to bet that if you stay at home with your kids, you do. We've forgotten what dignity there is in the dirty dishes. What honor is won in battling dust bunnies and soap scum. That with every household chore we do,

we honor God, we model Christ to our children, we build our homes- and that is spiritual warfare. For every Christian home that remains intact, it is a strike against the foe. And we women are on the frontlines of that, everyday, armed with mops and brooms and hearts that serve. It may seem humorous, and it is, because we serve a God with a sense of humor. But it's true. Our hands further the kingdom, and our hearts preserve it.

We should believe that.

But we know it's about more than just those daily tasks. **Anybody could do those- we could hire someone to come in and do all those things. It's about more than just the chores we do. It's about who we are, what we are, to our family, that makes motherhood so very meaningful, and makes us individually so important.**

You are the **living vine** of your home, you grow and flourish in every nook and cranny. Your creativity and personality are a bouquet of colors, your breath is the sweet scent of the bloom, your body is the cool shade where they lay their heads... Your roots stabilize, your stems and branches protect and shield, even though you don't know it. You grow in and around everything, creating a rich, lush canopy that shelters and nourishes. Everything about you, yes **YOU**- you with your love of crossword puzzles, or mystery novels, or chamomile tea, or the color purple, or whatever those things are that make you **YOU**... those things matter. *You* matter. **Everything about you creates a world for your family. Every nuance of who you are, every quirk, eccentricity- the songs you hum, the perfume you wear, the way you smile, the whole contour of your being... is completely and utterly meaningful. Like the vine, you send tendrils of yourself in every direction. You set the tone, your uniqueness grows a family that is special, different, distinct from any other in the whole world.**

You don't just create a home, my sister. **You are the home.** And it is beautiful in their eyes.

That thought... wow. It fills a need in me, one that goes bonedeeep, **to feel needed and important... to know why I'm here and what God wants from me.**

Nancy Wilson:

Women often give themselves a poor job description. This happens all the time. ("I'm just a stay-at-home mom. Excuse me for living.") But God has

given us good work to do and we should realize how much He values it and how effective it really is.

Scripture tells women to adorn themselves in good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10). A couple chapters later in 1 Timothy, we see what kind of woman can be added to the list of widows the church supports: if she is “well reported of for good works” ...such as (and this is very important).....

1. bringing up children
2. lodging strangers
3. washing the saints’ feet
4. relieving the afflicted
5. diligently following every good work.

Women are a huge resource in the church. As we embrace the jobs that God has given us, it is transforming us, our families, our church, and our town. It’s totally out of our hands.

Consider some of the women Paul makes mention of.

In Romans 16 Paul refers to several women who have helped him: Phoebe our sister, a servant of the church, a helper of many and of Paul also.

Priscilla was called one of his fellow workers who laid down her own neck for his life (and the church met in her home).

And he mentions Mary “who bestowed much labor on us.”

Ruth had a well-known reputation: “For all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.”

As we serve one another, this knits us together in love, confirms our family relationship to one another, and builds a healthy sturdy church. It is invisible, but by faith we see it.

Young women: you are able to help your mothers at home with this and learn from them how to do it.

Mothers: As you keep feeding your children, behold, they do grow! Keep your homes, build your homes. All your washing and shopping and planning and cooking and cleaning and swatting is used by God to make faithful homes and faithful children.

Unmarried women: Participate in the life of the church; embrace domesticity; learn from the older women; teach the younger women.

Widows: You may still be contributing to the life of the church by means of hospitality (even if it is just a cup of tea), encouraging the younger women to keep pressing on, sharing your stories and wisdom, getting to know younger families, and participating as much as you are able in the life of the church.

Remember the seasons of our lives change. What you are doing now won't be what you are doing in just a few years. Things change. Keep thinking long-term. God takes our little labors and multiplies the fruit of them.

Showers, weddings, potlucks, ladies' fellowship meetings, sabbath dinners, meals for needy families; these are all potent things, powerful things when we do them unto the Lord to glorify and please Him. They are not ends in themselves. As we give ourselves away, we find we have more, not less.

Here is a lovely virtue that women are designed for. It isn't in found in a list of virtues like some of the others we have discussed, but women are charged to be domestic, to be capable homemakers.

Domestic means simply, home-loving; enjoying household affairs; a devotion to home and family life.

Domesticity encompasses everything that has to do with managing a home. Women need to be trained to be domestic, just like they might be trained for any other job. Though women are designed for this, it does not follow that we know everything instinctively. It is a calling, not a hobby. The older women are to teach the younger women to be homemakers (Titus 2:4). That word *maker* is an important one. God is our Maker and He has given us the great privilege of *making* things in imitation of Him, whether it is a poem or a home. Women are given a glorious responsibility in homemaking.

Homekeeping refers to the nuts and bolts of managing a home, and *homemaking* has more to do with the intangibles; but both are necessary to build God-fearing, trinitarian homes.

Women are called to manage their homes (1 Tim. 5:14); this pleases God and keeps the adversary from speaking reproachfully. Women who *make* homes keep God's word from being blasphemed (Titus 2:4). The way I understand this is that a home that is well managed is a positive glory; a home in shambles is a poor testimony. But this is not to lay a guilt trip on women; rather, it should inspire us to view our seemingly mundane tasks as a truly worthy calling that God uses to transform the world. We often think of homekeeping as drudgery. But God says it silences our enemies. That is something potent. God always does things backwards from what we think. This requires wisdom.

“The *wise* woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands” (Prov. 14:1).

“Through *wisdom* a house is built and by *understanding* it is established; by *knowledge* the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Prov. 24:3-4).

Wisdom and knowledge are not things you can order from Pottery Barn. Consider *wisdom* when you decorate, make purchases, iron shirts, organize the closet, stock the pantry, clean the fridge, plan the menu, plant the petunias, hang the guest towels. Women are given dominion over a vast amount of territory in their homes. Our homes are to be an oasis to our families, a center of operations to refuel and send out our husbands, a refuge for our children, a delight to our own souls. But sadly, many women squander their opportunities and abandon their homes for something they think might be more fulfilling. But whenever we run away from what God has given us to do in order to pursue something we think we may like better, we give the enemy opportunity to speak reproachfully and we miss God’s blessing on our lives.

The woman described in Proverbs 31 (vs. 27) “watches over the ways of her *household*, and does not eat the bread of idleness.” Many things can distract us from our duties. It could be a “ministry” somewhere outside the home. It could be getting together with the girls for coffee. It could be working out at the gym. None of these things is bad in itself, but each can be a cover for idleness.

The woman in Proverbs 31 is meant to be an inspiration for us. She is virtuous. If you read through the description, you’ll see she has a very broad job description: She seeks, works willingly, does good, brings food, rises, provides, considers, plants, girds, strengthens, perceives, stretches, extends, reaches out, is not afraid, makes, sells, supplies, rejoices, opens, watches, and fears the Lord. She is prepared. She is wise. She knows what her household needs.

G.K. Chesterton in one of the essays in *Brave New Family*, says that a homemaker can be good at many things, while a “professional” may be an expert in one thing. Women, he says, have so much more scope at home than they do in a “career” outside the home where they must focus on only one skill.

The unmarried woman has the opportunity to be domestic whether she is living at home with her parents or has her own home. She most likely has to work outside the home to provide for herself (unless she is independently wealthy), but she can still make her home her central

calling. Women are to be home-centered, even if they are not in it all the time.

Mothers need to be preparing their daughters to be excited about homemaking. Many things are required of a homemaker and many skills are needed. Our culture does not give the homemaker the honor she deserves. But God does.

Helpful links:

<http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo2/2bluett.php>

<http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo8/8segelstein.php>

There are a lot of reasons to have kids – God commands it (Gen. 1), it’s a way to grow his kingdom (Mal. 2; Matt. 18), and kids can be a ton of fun. But having kids is also good for growth in grace. Like getting married, having children pressures us to die to ourselves in new ways. We learn the meaning of sacrifice in a much greater way. And the more we live sacrificially, the more we are enabled to appreciate the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

The love of parents for their children is unique. It makes parents uniquely vulnerable. Abigail Adams to her husband John about their son John Quincy: “when he is wounded, I bleed.” A parent thinks, ‘I would die for my child if I had to.’ But remember that God has already died for your child!

What do we most want for our children? An easy comfortable, pain free life? Or that they would fear God and walk in ways, however hard it might be? Shelter them, but do not coddle them and open the door to more and more challenges as they grow. Do not orchestrate their lives so they avoid all pain, challenge, suffering, and (yes, even) temptation. This is sure to stunt their development spiritually, if not in other ways, and lock them into immaturity.

Again, what do we want most for our children? Athletic success? An Ivy League education? Or godliness? This is NOT to say that these things are incompatible. If our children are pushed to grow in grace, many of them will become elite

because they will be using their gifts to the fullest extent. But, as a matter of priorities, we must put their spiritual growth and fidelity first.

More to the point: If your kids were asked, "What are mom and dad most passionate about? And what do they most want for you?" how would they answer? Maybe you should find out. You may be communicating something to them quite different from what you thought.

Grown children are to be released into the world. The olive plants grow up. The arrows have to be fired into the world (Ps. 127).

But there are a number of questions that come up. How to parents relate to grown children? Parents move into more a friend/counselor role. But even then, parents should be careful about offering unsolicited advice; they also be wary of using gifts (monetary and otherwise) as leverage. Parents can help, but must do in subtle and delicate ways.

Of course, if children have been raised to act wisely, the children will want to consult their parents about all kinds of decisions. They will seek our guidance from parents and other wiser mentors.

Daughters can certainly benefit from having some kind of covering until they are married, whether it comes in the form of a father who still oversees her, or elders in the church, or some other father figure. But a young woman will not function well under such extended headship unless she wants it and puts herself under it voluntarily. A father who tries to be a head for his grown daughter when she does not want it will only make things worse and quite possibly provoke rebellion. Again, this is why how we raise our children while they are in the home is so important: We want to raise our children in such a way that they will be able to see their weaknesses and desire Spiritual protection/guidance.

On the Spiritual benefits of parenting, see Thomas, *Sacred Parenting*, ch. 8-9, 12. On leaving Spiritual heritage for your children, see ch. 10-11. On the demands of parenting, see p. 42, 188f, 192, 193ff. On giving your children away, see Thomas ch. 13. Thomas points that when kids are grown, as parents, we can still sleep at

night, remembering that God is still with them when we no longer can be. In the end, parenting pushes us to learn to live by faith in new ways.

From C. S. Lewis' *The Four Loves*:

The husband is the head of the wife just in so far as he is to her what Christ is to the Church. He is to love her as Christ loved the church—read on—and *gave his life for her* (Ephesians 5:25).

This headship, then, is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion; whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is—in her own mere nature—least lovable. For the church has no beauty but what the bridegroom gives her; he does not find, but makes her, lovely.

The chrism [anointing, consecration] of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife or the faults of the bad one, in his unwearying (never paraded) care or his inexhaustible forgiveness: forgiveness, not acquiescence.

As Christ sees in the flawed, proud, fanatical or lukewarm Church on earth that bride who will one day be without spot or wrinkle, and labors to produce the latter, so the husband whose headship is Christ-like (and he is allowed no other sort) never despairs. He is a King Cophetua who after twenty years still hopes that the beggar-girl will one day learn to speak the truth and wash behind her ears.