

# The Family, in Perspective

Jim Elliff

One of the fascinating things about the New Testament's teaching on family life is that so little is actually said.

We all know that the family is the major component of any society and that its failure is a failure of the whole of society and the sign of its eventual demise. We can hardly imagine that the New Testament writers understood familial essentiality any differently than we do. Yet, with this knowledge, they chose, or we may say that the Holy Spirit chose, to put only little in terms of space devoted to the family itself.

What is said is enough, of course, to guide us. There are the passages that speak of the order of the home, the authority and submission necessary for its proper function. The obedience of children is seen in two or three places. Husbands must love their wives and father's must discipline their children. And a word about submission to unreasonable husbands has its place. This is about it. One could put the New Testament's words specifically concerning family matters on about two pages, if that.



The verses God gives us on family life *are* enough to demand our complete attention. Sermons should be preached on these passages. The verses should be used for counseling others. Classes and seminars may justifiably be arranged for the promotion of what they teach us. And, if the society is weak in this issue (or for that matter, any other area of discipleship), then it is reasonable that they receive our immediate concentration.

So, what is the point of my mentioning the scarcity of verses on family life? It is for this reason: to point out that the way to be a good husband and father and a good wife and mother, or a good child—to actually please God in this—is more about being a conscientious follower of Christ in general than about any specific code of behavior related to the family itself.

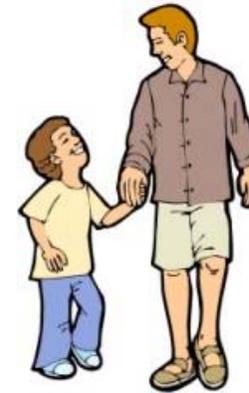
For instance, if a man is kind in his home, not cranky or disagreeable or argumentative, then the family will be a much more peaceful place. If a child lives lovingly toward the other members of the family, just as he is commanded to do towards all people, then the home may have rest from many tensions. If the wife will forgive the husband for his faults, then there is hope for harmony. There is nothing in what I've said that is not expected of every Christian; indeed this is to be the *fruit* of

every Christian. Yet, for your family itself, in your particular situation, such simple admonitions may provide the “silver bullet,” bringing hope for a remarkable family recovery.

Here then might be a good place to start—applying a general command to the home:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31-32)

There is enough in these two verses to radically transform your home. Believing families, who have been given the source for all love in the Spirit who indwells them, *can* do what this verse commands. And, it might surprise you what joy can return to the home if these very verses are obeyed.



I'm already feeling guilty, of course. Often I transgress this law of love. What a disagreeable person I can be when I am self-focused. But there is hope. Like exercise, you and I will have no benefits from any such truths, unless they are practiced—rather obeyed—and, with a spirit of joy and trust in the Spirit's power. And when obeyed, the benefits of such obedience brings should drive you to more.

These verses are a family seminar in a capsule. Conscientiously memorize and practice these potent words and you will benefit perhaps more than if you had spilled your soul to a counselor. If counselors are reading this, I expect they would say, “Yes!” to all I have just said.

OK, I know that some people are too far diminished in their marriage to cope with each other well. Some have particularly difficult issues to deal with that require expert help. I also know that simple statements about loving each other seem not to be enough. But these words are not just any words, and they are not trite—they are God's own plan for getting along. Even the first century apostles had to live by these admonitions. If Paul himself were your counselor, he would point you to this same set of commands. And, remember again, you who are true Christians *can* obey them.

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