

Family and Worship

Introduction

It is significant that when the Bible describes the role of pastor and uses comparisons to further describe that role, it uses the **relationship of a father with his family** to describe this role. A pastor is not compared to the CEO of a large business organization. This is interesting because in Christendom today, many think that what will make a man a good pastoral leader is that he has good business skills. In fact some “churches” resemble business organizations with all the machinery that goes with that.

The pastor is also not described in the New Testament as a military leader, with an elaborate hierarchy of rank, and one that exercises absolute, dictatorial authority.

The pastor is deliberately described in the Bible as a **good father** who has authority over his family which is based on **love and respect**. One of the best ways for a man to learn to be a **good pastor** is for him to learn to be a **good husband** and a **good father**! Rarely will a man be a good pastor who is not a good husband and a good father. A man may be a great preacher without these things, but he will not be a good pastor. The crying need in our churches today is for good pastors. I believe that the Lord is still doing as He did in the Old Testament when He said in Jeremiah 3:15, “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

I have known many men who had great preaching gifts but who neglected their wives and children. Such men are usually on an **ego trip**. They enjoy being admired as great preachers and enjoy speaking to large, adoring congregations. Brethren we should not strive to be like this. We should strive to be good family men. There is a reason why God puts such a high premium on family—the family is the first social institution that the Lord set up. The Lord set up the family in the Garden of Eden before He set up a church or institutions of human government. The family is under great attack today in almost all nations. I read in one place that the family is the bulls-eye on Satan’s target.

One of the most effective ways that we can be good pastors to our people is to show by example how to be good fathers and husbands.

The Scriptural Record

In 1 Timothy, chapter three, we have listed the attributes that must characterize a godly pastor or bishop. Prominent in this list of qualifications are those recorded in verses three and four, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” Let us examine some of the words in this passage. First, the word translated “rule.” What does this mean? Does it mean to rule arbitrarily and inflexibly, with an “iron hand”? The word translated “rule” here is *proi,sthmi* (*proistemi*). According to W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* the word

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means, “to stand before, hence, to lead, attend to (indicating care and diligence).” The good father and the good pastor is a good leader. He cares for those he is leading. They follow him because they respect him and they know he cares for them. He is the man described in 1 Peter 5:3, “Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

This passage in 1 Timothy says that he must have his children “in subjection.” This word has a variety of similar meanings. Some of them are “to subject one's self, obey,” “to submit to one's control,” “to yield to one's admonition or advice.” It is obvious here that the father/pastor must have control of his children. As it says in Titus 1:6, “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” Speaking of Abraham the Lord said in Genesis 18:19, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” It is obvious that Abraham exercised authority in his household. But it was the authority of love and respect. There are two extremes to which we can go in our relationships with our children and with our congregations. On the one hand we can be too lax. We can refuse to exercise our responsibility of leadership, and just let people do what they want to do. The other extreme is to exercise harsh and arbitrary authority. We must not yield to either of these extremes, but must be **strong**, but **loving** leaders. God will hold us responsible for instructing our children and our congregations to live according to the Scriptures. Let us pray that He will help us to walk so close to Him that we can maintain the proper balance.

The passage in Timothy says that this father will have to exercise this authority “with all gravity.” The word translated here is *semno, thj* (semnotes). It is a very interesting word. It “denotes venerableness, dignity.” It is “the characteristic of a thing or person which entitles to reverence and respect, dignity, majesty, sanctity.” Obviously the father/pastor must be a man who so behaves himself that he inspires respect. I do not believe that this means that he cannot laugh or be pleasant to be around. However, he must not behave foolishly or without dignity. He must be essentially a very serious-minded man. My father-in-the-ministry, Elder Hassell Wallis, is such a man. I always wanted to please him and obey him. I wanted to do this because I loved and respected him. I knew that he was interested in me and always had my best interests at heart. My own father-in-the-flesh was this sort of man. My dad was a very pleasant man, who had a good sense of humor. He laughed often and enjoyed life to the fullest. But he was also a very honorable man who took his responsibilities very seriously. We children loved him with great affection, but we also greatly respected him, his life style, and what he stood for. We, as fathers and pastors, must strive to be these kinds of men.

We must have no weaknesses, character qualities, or habits of speech or behavior that would cause those we lead to lose respect for us.

We are not perfect and we will make mistakes. We must learn how to acknowledge those mistakes and to ask for forgiveness when we have done wrong. Many men have the idea that it is a sign of weakness to admit wrong and to apologize. The opposite, however, is true. Those we are over and those we serve will respect us all the more when we acknowledge our weaknesses. Thankfully, both my wife and children respect me and treat me with honor. They do this knowing that I am prone to mistakes but that I am usually quick to acknowledge it when I am wrong.

Usually a pastor who has a happy home will have a happy church.

Another Scripture that shows the family-type relations that should characterize church members is 1 Timothy 5:1, 2, “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.” Here it is plain that we should treat each older man in our congregations with the same respect we would treat our own father. We should treat each young man as if he were our own brother. We should treat each older woman with the same respect we would render to our own mother. We should treat each younger woman in the church as we would our own sister. And we should be especially careful to behave with absolute purity in our dealings with younger women.

Treatment of Our Wives

One area in which pastors should be very careful is in the way they treat their wives. Some men do not treat their wives appropriately and blame it on the culture in which they live. Some cultures are harsher in their treatment of women than others. However, the Holy Word of God transcends all cultures! Those who believe the Bible **must** treat their women as God dictates in His word. The Christian pastor must be a **great example** to the ungodly world about him as to the proper treatment of women. The Bible leaves no doubt about the attitude husbands should have toward their wives. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...” We must treat our dear wives like the Lord Jesus treats us. He is patient, kind, tender, and compassionate with us. He is vitally interested in our welfare. He takes time to communicate with us. He is always ready to hear of our fears and misgivings. His ear is always open to our cries. He is never too busy to talk to us. He knows us very well. Sometimes we men are ignorant of some of the emotional needs of our own wives. This is inexcusable and is a violation of God’s Word. He has told us in 1 Peter 3:7, “Likewise, ye husbands, **dwelt 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.”

One besetting sin of men seems to be harshness toward their wives. We can become very impatient when our wives displease us and be very hurting in our remarks to them. I say that this must be a very common sin of husbands because Paul addressed it specifically in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” The word translated “bitter” is *pikrai*,nw (*pikraino*). It comes from a root that means “to cut, to prick.” It means to “to embitter exasperate.” We should not behave in such a manner that our wives are exasperated at us. In fact, **our wives should always feel safe and comfortable in our presence**. They should not dread to see us come home. One of the most beautiful passages of Scripture is found in Ruth 1:9, where Naomi wished for her daughters-in-law that, “The LORD grant you that **ye may find rest**, each of you in the house of her husband...” The Hebrew word translated “rest” is used 21 times in the Old Testament and is variously translated “rest, resting place, comfortable, ease, quiet, still.” We preachers ought to consider it our sacred duty before God to have the happiest wives in the world. After all we must remember that according to Ephesians 5 the relationship between husband and wife is to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church.

Treatment of Our Children

We have already alluded to this but more must be said. What kind of attitude are we to have toward our children? How are we to behave toward them? It is true that we are over them and must insist that they obey us and live proper lives before us. But we must do this in such a way that we encourage them and set the proper example before them. They must **absolutely know** that we love them and are willing to sacrifice our lives, if necessary, for their sakes. We read in Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The parallel passage is Colossians 3:21, “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” The word translated “discouraged” is from a Greek word which means, “to be disheartened, dispirited, broken in spirit.” When training a child we need to control his will, but we must not break his spirit. A father is a masculine symbol of authority but there is plenty of room for compassion and tenderness here also. Paul made this plain in 1 Thessalonians 2:11, “As ye know how we **exhorted** and **comforted** and **charged** every one of you, as a father doth his children...” The basic meaning of “exhort” is “to encourage, strengthen.” The word translated “comfort” here means “to speak to, address one, whether by way of admonition and incentive, or to calm and console.” The basic meaning of the word translated “charged” is “to testify or bear witness.” Here, the father is no doubt sharing with his children experiences from his own life. He is telling of successes, admitting failures, and testifying as to the great faithfulness of the Lord to him. All this implies that the father spends **much, quality**, time with his children.

A father who prayerfully deals in such a way with his children will usually be blessed to have obedient children who love and respect him. For a pastor, children like these will be a great asset to his ministry.

Family Worship

It is imperative that we worship God in our homes. Congregational worship is indispensable. Nothing, including the home, will take the place of the church. But home worship is also a necessity. Blessed indeed is the father who will take the time and effort to instruct his children in the things of the Lord on a daily basis. This home worship was emphasized already in Old Testament times. Speaking of the things of the Lord it was said in Deut. 6: 7, 8, “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.” This home worship is part of what was under consideration in Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” This is a daily task.

Many fathers, strangely even pastors, either dread family worship or feel inadequate for it. Others don't

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see the vital importance of it and deem it be a nuisance. We need to develop an enthusiasm for this activity and to plan for it. Satan knows how important this is and he will try to hinder in any way he can. Sometimes, especially when family worship is not properly done, the children, and maybe even the wife, begin to dread it.

We should strive to make family worship as pleasant as possible. Families should spend a little time each day in praising God together in song. It is good to sometimes let the children choose some of the songs. It will be interesting for the family to learn some new songs together. Part of the family worship should be prayer. Family members should tell what some of their needs are. We should pray diligently for our church members and others who are in need of prayer. The father does not have to do all the leading in prayer. He can often let another family member lead. A good spiritual project would be for the family to memorize some portion of Scripture together. At the beginning of each worship session they can check to how the memory work is coming along. Entire chapters of the Bible may be memorized. Perhaps there is a distinct problem in the family that needs to be addressed in the memory work. For example, let us suppose that the family has been bothered by heated arguments among some of the family members. A very helpful Scripture to memorize would be Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." Maybe there has been a problem with unforgiveness. A very appropriate passage to memorize in this case would be Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

No family devotional is complete without some reading of the Word of God and some teaching and exhortation from it. The devotional will go a lot better if the father has put some thought and prayer into it. Sometimes it might be good to just read books of the Bible together as a family. A chapter or so at each session might be enough. There can be infinite variety as we have 66 books of the inspired word of God to choose from!

The dad should take into consideration the ages of his children as he conducts the family worship. A longer time of family worship would be more appropriate for older children than for the very young. Some songs that would appeal to little children are good to maintain interest and teach Scriptural truths.

The family devotional, properly planned, prayed over, and carried out, should be among the most pleasant memories of children of godly homes. One of the best-known of Primitive Baptist ministers was Elder Sylvester Hassell, who lived from 1842-1928. His father was Elder C. B. Hassell. Sylvester, in commenting on the family worship times conducted by his father, said:

As far back as I can remember he was in the habit of assembling his family around the family altar every morning and evening to read a portion of Scripture, sing a hymn of praise, and to pour forth in the most humble and reverent manner his thanksgiving and supplications at the throne of grace. I can truly say that these were the most affecting, happy, and blessed seasons of my life. They are evergreen spots in memory's waste, forming the nearest approach to Heaven that I have ever realized on earth. He sang well, and taught his children to sing. On Sunday morning, after prayers, he took great delight in instructing his children in Scripture history and the plan of salvation, and continually, both by precept

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and example, he strove to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have often felt and said that I would rather have such a father than all the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world.

Dear brothers, it would be a crowning achievement on our lives and ministries if our children and our church members could speak this way about us. Let us prayerfully strive to so worship God in our homes and in our churches.

So, help us, dear God!

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