

The Divine Pattern for the Family, Part 1 *Understanding the Issues*

Introduction

We now to Ephesians 6:1-4, and our subject is the family. However, before we look specifically at the text, I want to give you a picture of what is going on around us in our world, so that you can better understand the importance of this text.

A. The Source of the Attack on the Family

Satan is attacking the family. We have already seen some of the ways he attacks the husband-wife relationship. In the aftermath of that attack, the family pays a tremendous price. For example, only 7 percent of Americans currently live in what we know as a normal family, where the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the homemaker (Ellen Goodman, "The Eruption of a Now-Styled Family Feud," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 June 1978). That is a dramatic statistic, indicating that we have moved a long way from the divine plan of God established for the family. The family is being attacked by Satan.

1. God's plan

When God originally called out Israel as a people. He established that they be His witnesses. The nation of Israel was not an end in itself; it was a means to an end. God did not call Israel to be a bucket to receive all of His blessings, but a channel through which He could pass His blessings to the world. Israel was to communicate the truth about God to the world.

a. The message of God

1) The theology

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). This was the standard message, the basic heart of God's truth---the great statement that there is only one God. And it was to be passed on to the world.

2) The response

"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (v. 5). That is to be the human response to the reality of God.

b. The mechanics of passing it on

1) Personal commitment

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart" (v. 6). The first key to passing on God's message to the world was that they had to make a personal commitment to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might. Once they made that commitment, there was a second step.

2) Parental communication

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children” (v. 7). That is God’s plan for passing on the truth about Himself---from parent to child. As a child matures, he becomes a parent to the next generation, and so on. How are God’s truths to be communicated?

a) In speech

“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” (v. 7). Godly words were to be flowing out of their mouths. They were to be constantly speaking about the things of God.

b) In symbols

“Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes” (v. 8). Even when there was silence, there was to be a visible commitment to the law of God. Here it was symbolized in what they wore.

c) In surroundings

“Thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (v. 9). Even when the parents weren’t home, their children were to see the law of God written all over the house.

The children were to see God’s Word throughout the house in their parent’s absence; they were to see it symbolized in what their parents wore; and they were to hear it when their parents opened their mouths. The law of God was to be passed on so that godliness and righteousness could move from one generation to the next.

2. Satan’s resistance

From the beginning, Satan has tried to upset the plan of God. To accomplish that, he plans to undermine the righteous see. He wants to destroy the family by disrupting it, removing the children, and creating quarrels so that the family life becomes chaotic. He uses divorces, separations, adulteries, fornications, and whatever else he can to fracture the family so it cannot do what God intends it do.

B. The Strategy of the Attack on the Family

1. Fathers attacked

In many cases, fathers have abandoned their God-given role. A leading secular psychologist from the Menninger Clinic, Harold Voth, has written a provocative book called ***The Castrated Family***. He presents the thesis that if the father is not the head of the family, there can be nothing but chaos. He says that the father is responsible for structure and form and for establishing the family standards, character, direction, and strength. And if he doesn’t do that, it castrates the family.

We know the fathers are being attacked. They’re being attacked when they’re diverted from their wives and children to fulfill their own desires, to be the macho man, and to be satisfied. They lose their concentration on loving the family, providing for the family, caring for the family, and offering them strength, stability, character, leadership, and solid teaching---bringing them up in things of God. Now, apart from Christ, we know

that those things are impossible. But it's sad to see that so many Christian fathers have become preoccupied with the television set, their business, making money, accumulating material things, lusting after other women, and other things that tend to overthrow their priorities.

2. Mothers attacked

Mothers are being forced out of the home. By 1990, perhaps 45 percent of the United States' work force will be women. Already 6 million children under the age of six have working mothers. Nearly half of all children under the age of eighteen have working mothers. Women are intimidated into leaving the home. They're told, "Don't let yourself settle for being a homemaker. You're too good for that. Push yourself out into the world." They become exposed to the temptations of other women, material things, worldly philosophies, and worldly lifestyle. I believe this failure of mothers is a result of the failure of fathers to give spiritual strength and character to their families.

3. Children attacked

a. Abandoned at home

According to David Elkind in an article in *Psychology Today*, "One major change is the form of middle-class mothering. For a mother to work voluntarily while her children were young was once seen as a sign of bad parenting, a rejection of the maternal role. But today, going to work and placing a child with a caretaker or in a day-care center [or at a preschool] is accepted practice. For many children, that means coming home to empty houses after school and tending to their own meals, clothing, hygiene" ("Growing Up Faster" [Feb. 1979]: 41). And, as one woman added, it also includes locking doors on school holidays and having children sit in front of the TV.

b. Influenced by TV

1) Violent role models

Dr. Walter Menninger, a psychiatrist connected with Topeka State Hospital, said we are raising a generation of violently aggressive women who are being formed through children's exposure to TV fantasy female super-heroes ("Effects of TV Aggression on Girls Worry Expert," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Feb. 1979). Some TV shows are showing girls outside a normal understanding and comprehension of God's role for women.

2) Godless morality

a) According to Ben Stein in *The View from Sunset Boulevard*, interviews with the forces behind television (executives, producers, writers) reveal that they are systematically attempting to overthrow traditional American values (New York: Basic Books, 1979). That is accomplished primarily through the situation comedy: you can get people to buy a whole new philosophy if you can get them to laugh with it.

b) TV character consume ten times more alcohol than coffee.

- c) According to the National Federation of Decency (Fall 1978), 88 percent of all sex depicted on TV is outside marriage.
- 3) Stifled communication
In many cases, parents don't talk to their children because they're too busy watching TV.
- c. Raised by day-care centers
The Denver Post ran an article about a group of day-care workers who were trying to start a union to protect themselves from abusive children (Marice Doll, "Day-Care Mothers Air Gripes," "Pain," 5 Feb. 1979). The article said children arrived "with runny noses, chicken pox, and bad manners." The day-care workers had to teach potty training, table manners, respect, and just about everything else---all at about a fifty-to-one percent ratio. These day-care workers were so frustrated they hoped to form a union to get some help.
- d. Abused according to statistics
- 1) An estimated 750,000 children live in foster homes, residential facilities, institutions, mental hospitals, or are in prisons (Curtis J. Sitomer, "who Speaks for the Child? The Right to a Home and Family," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 Feb. 1979).
 - 2) Four out of ten children will live in a broken home.
 - 3) Eighteen million children are currently living with step-parents.
 - 4) Between seven and fourteen million children will become alcoholics, based on the statistics concerning children of alcoholics who become alcoholics themselves.
 - 5) Sixty-five out of every one thousand children between the ages of seven and eleven have received psychiatric help.
 - 6) American children are indulged with more than 4 billion dollars of toys each year---more than the gross national product of sixty-three nations.
 - 7) The average age of beginning smokers has dropped from fourteen to ten.
 - 8) One million young girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen get pregnant every year.
 - 9) Ten million minors have venereal diseases, and five thousand new victims contract it every day.
 - 10) One child in five uses drugs twice a week.
 - 11) The only age group with increased births in America is girls from age eleven to fourteen.

Our children are being attacked by an anti-God philosophy. We can't stand around in indifference and expect them to turn out all right in the end. Fighting against this encroaching evil system is a full-time job.

C. The Specifics of the Attack on the Family

1. The curse of sin

The curse of sin is built into the family. The curse causes men to be oppressive, despotic, and chauvinistic; it causes women to want to rule over men and usurp their position authority, and it causes children to rebel. It is only in a family where its members are Spirit-filled and obedient to the word of God that God's standards for the family can be fulfilled.

• **Children Committing Suicide**

The suicide rate among children is staggering. Between 10 and 15 percent of children have tried or have contemplated suicide. Charlotte Ross, director of the San Mateo Suicide Prevention Center, said children as young as six or seven are trying to kill themselves ("Suicides Among Young Persons Said to Have Tripled in 20 Years," *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1979). And she laid the blame on what she calls "the way our society has of alienating kids."

Lois Timnick, human behavior writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote an article about child suicide ("They're Sad, Young and Want to Die," 25 Feb. 1978). She says, "For years the experts questioned whether young children could really suffer severe depression and intentionally seek death. Now it seems clear that they do both, and that many 'accidents'---like swallowing poison or darting into heavy traffic---are in fact conscious or unconscious suicide attempts."

Timnick quotes one authority as saying, "For the younger aged children, the most frequent immediate event leading to referral [clinical treatment] was perceived or imagined abandonment by a parent figure." In other words, when a child feels he has been abandoned by his parent, whether imagined or real, it is the first step in the direction of suicide. According to this article, violence between a mother and father, the birth of a new brother or sister, competition for the parent's love, and a mother's decision to go back to work can all be interpreted by children as rejection and can contribute to attempts of suicide.

2. The failure of parents

Parents have failed---even Christian parents have failed. God can restore us, forgive us, and help us get our families get back together again. We need to understand the reality of what God is asking. The emotional and spiritual needs of children are not being met. We are allowing the world to raise our children by allowing them to sit in front of the TV and watch the filth the world pumps out.

Your children depend on you; you can't hire someone to do what you aren't willing to do. As one woman said, "You will never get children to respond to what people do for money but you won't do for love." If you are gone all the time---and if you don't talk to your children, you're going to lose them. The sad fact is, what starts out in your life as a great joy can end up as the biggest heartbreak.

- ***The Fallacy of the Financial Needs for the Wife to Work***

In most families the wife probably doesn't need to work. Why? Because in most cases the family doesn't really need the money. Recently on Chicago network television, one of the leading financial experts in our country was talking about this problem. Amazingly, he said that indulgent materialism is what has forced the woman into the work force. He said that often by the time a couple pays the increased income tax and supports the wife's wardrobe, transportation, meals outside the home, and child care, the actual increase in income could not exceed 10 percent. He also said that because indebtedness of the family is usually increased, even the gain may be ultimately lost in the payment of additional interest on debts. He stated that the families in the U.S. carrying the largest unpaid debt are the families with both husband and wife working.

We're spending so much time acquiring things that we're forgetting our children. Children are treasures that God has given to us to care for and to be raised---not to be like us---but to be like Jesus Christ.

- ***Are Children Getting Older at a Younger Age?***

Do you realize that the age of puberty is now two to five years earlier than it was in the past? In the eighteenth century, the Bach choirboys who sang soprano had to leave the choir when they were eighteen years old because their voices began to change. Now adolescence begins at an average of thirteen years of age. The age of puberty is getting lower and lower. In fact, according to Anne C. Petersen in an article in *Psychology Today*, it lowers four months per decade ("Can Puberty Come Any Earlier?" [Feb. 1979]: 45). In 1900, human growth continued to an average age of twenty-six. Today growth stops, on an average, between seventeen and eighteen years of age. In 1600, the average age of puberty varied between seventeen and twenty. In 1990 it was more than fourteen.

Children are becoming more aware of their physical and sexual world at an earlier age. People may think children in junior high don't have problems in the sexual area, but they do, and they desperately need adults not only to guide them but to police their activities. School principals have told me that even sixth graders can have major problems in the area of sexual discovery.

This lowering age of puberty has many causes. One factor is early exposure to sex. Sex is pounded into the children's brains when they turn on the TV and when they walk by a magazine rack; it's there constantly---sexual music, books, magazines, television, and movies. Children are shoved into a sex-mad thinking pattern before their minds, and few receive the parental instruction they need. And you can't just teach them, you have to police them, because they don't have the ability to maintain proper standards yet.

Another factor comes with what David Elkind in an article in *Psychologist Today* calls "hurried children" ("Growing Up Faster" [Feb. 1979]: 40). Young girls are wearing clothes styled after men's clothing. There are few distinctions. Children are shoved into an over-achievement world. Parents push their children into adult lifestyles long before they're given the proper instructions on how to handle them.

3. The emergence of humanistic philosophy

F.M. Esfandiary, quoted in an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, said that he looks for a world where there will be no schools, no families, and no parent-child relationships ("Utopia Without Families," 20 Mar. 1978). To free the child, he says, we must do away with parenthood---marriage must go. We must settle for nothing less than the total elimination of the family. That philosophy is being propagated by many humanists---and their arguments are effective.

a. The International Year of the Child

On April 4, 1978, President Carter issued an executive order proclaiming 1979 as the International Year of the Child (IYC) in the United States. It recognized the twentieth anniversary of the "Child's Bill of Rights," which was established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1959. Many people's initial reaction was, "Great, children need help." The philosophy behind the idea, however, was as satanic as everything else attacking the home.

1) Its source

The IYC was inseparably linked to the International Women's Year (IWY) and to the International Women's Decade (IWD). The years from 1976 to 1986 were designated as the decade of the woman. Betty Freidan, a prime intellectual mover in the women's liberation movement, commented on a conversation she had at the World Conference for Women in Mexico City: "I had a curious luncheon invitation from a woman involved with [an]old-time Communist Women's group... [They said] did I know, by the way, it was they who introduced the resolution to make 1975 International Women's Year?" (*It Changed My Life* [New York: Random, 1976], p. 345). So the while concept was atheistic, socialistic, and humanistic at its roots.

2) Its efforts

The IYC, IWY, and the IWD are all efforts towards socialism. One ultimate end of socialism is to take children out of the home and family and educate them by

the state. Why? Because if parents don't have their children, they can't pass any righteous standards, moral values, ethics, religion, or political feelings. Parents can't pass on anything if they don't have their children. (In the U.S. Congress, there are bills that have been on the floor since 1971 that recommend taking children out of the home at the age of six months, putting them into government day-care centers, educating them by the government until they reach six years of age, and then putting them in public schools.) That's a socialistic, atheistic, godless approach to destroying the family.

b. The Child's Bill of Rights

The "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" that the United Nations put out in 1959 seemed innocuous. But when you see how it's being defined today, it's a different story. From their own writings, we discover how international social planners are trying to "liberate" children.

1) Liberation from traditional moral values

"The real solution requires a fundamental change in the value commitment and the actions of the persons who control the public and private sectors of our common life [such as] parents" (*White House Conference on Children, Report to the President*, 1970, p. 66).

"Day-care is a powerful institution... A day-care program that ministers to a child from six months to six years of age has over 8,000 hours to teach him values, fears, beliefs, and behaviors" (*White House Conference on Children*, p. 278). You can believe that those values, fears, beliefs, and behaviors will not be God's. Gloria Steinem said, "By the year 2000 we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God" ("How Will We Raise Our Children in the Year 2000?" *Saturday Review of Education* [March 1973]: 30).

2) Liberation from parental authority

Some officials have said, "We recommend that laws dealing with the rights of parents be reexamined and changed when they infringe on the rights of children" (*White House Conference on Children*, p. 361). One of the things experts talk about is physical punishment. Some day you may not be able to spank or discipline your child. Humanist psychologist Richard Farson says we have to free children from physical punishment, we have to free children from physical punishment, we have to free them to vote, and we have to give them total sexual freedom (*Birthrights* [New York: Macmillan, 1974]). Such people want to have a classless, sexless, Godless, Christless society.

3) Liberation from distinction

"The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination" (Principle 10, 1959) United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of the Child). That "protection" has been interpreted to forbid Buddhist parents to teach their children Buddhism and Christian parents to teach their children Christianity. Children would be removed from homes so that their parents would have no influence in them at all. They would be "protected" from their parents' religion.

4) Liberation from nationalism and patriotism

A book prepared by UNESCO says that “as long as the child breathes the poisoned air of nationalism, education in world-mindedness can produce only rather precarious results. As we have pointed out, it is frequently the family that infects the child with extreme nationalism. The school should therefore use the means described earlier to combat family attitudes in favour [that]” (*Towards World Understanding*, book 5, 1953, p. 58)/ In other words, they propose preventing your child from loving his country. They say we need to cut children loose from past political traditions, morals, values, and religion.

As we try to raise godly children, we are fighting a powerful enemy. The enemy has captured the media, and that media is in the TV, in books, in papers, in music, in schools--everywhere. And unless you commit yourself to raising your children, it's going to be difficult.

It's getting tougher and tougher to live as a Christian in this world. It's not easy. Commit yourselves to your children, or you'll wake up one day with tragedy on your hands. I thank God for His Word, because it tells how to conquer this movement that threatens to engulf our societies and destroy our families. Everything is in the Word of God. You may ask, “What could a two-thousand-year-old book have to say about this?” The Bible may have been written two thousand years ago, but it's alive today because times haven't changed, men haven't change, and certainly God hasn't changed. What He says today is absolutely as current, up to date, and essential for us.

Lesson

I. The Submission of the Child (vv. 1-3)

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. 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.”

This is the only command in the Bible given specifically to children. The word **children** used in verse 1 is *τα τέκνα* in the Greek text. It doesn't mean “little babies”; it refers to any offspring under parental control. So anyone at any age living in the house who identifies himself as a child of that family is to obey his parents (an action) and honor his father and mother (an attitude).

II. The Submission of the Parents (v. 4)

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

That's a tough job. Bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; don't leave it to the world to raise them. If you do, the world will raise them, but when they get done, it will be a tragedy.

Parents, you'd better take your stand with Jesus Christ, make a conscious break with the ungodly system of the world, and commit yourselves to your family. Also, realize that no matter what mistakes you've made in the past, God graciously forgives. And remember the promise in Proverbs 22:6, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is*

old, he will not depart from it." You do your job and bring your child up in the way God wants him to be brought up, and God will honor that.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What statistic indicates that we have moved a long way from the divine plan for the family?
2. In what sense was the nation of Israel a means to an end?
3. How was God's truth passed on to a new generation in ancient Israel?
4. What has been Satan's plan against the family? Why?
5. What results in a family if the father is not its head? What is the father responsible for in a family?
6. How are mothers being attacked?
7. What is the cause for the failure of many women to be dedicated mothers?
8. How have children often been abandoned? What often influences them more than their parents do? Explain its negative effects/
9. Why would a day-care center probably not give the same quality of attention that a mother might give her child?
10. How does the curse of sin effect children? What does it cause them to do?
11. Describe the reasons children have for committing suicide.
12. What has forced many women into the work force? What American families have carried the largest unpaid debt?
13. How does early exposure to sexual situations challenge today's children?
14. What is the ultimate end of socialism regarding children? What will that prevent parents from doing?
15. From what are social planners trying to liberate children?
16. What is the only command in the Bible ever given specifically to children?
17. According to Ephesians 6:4, how are parents supposed to raise their children?

Pondering the Principles

1. How would you rate the quality of communication between you and your children? Does your job demand so much time that they sometimes seem like strangers? When you get home, do you find yourself distracted by tiredness, television, or household duties? Think of some creative ways you could make maximum use of the time you have available for them. Maybe you could wash the car or run errands together. Maybe you could meet for lunch at a park in the middle of the week. Plan some family outings for the next few months, being careful that other things don't cause you to cancel those family times, which are extremely important to children. If they feel your time with them is a low priority, they will doubt the genuineness of your love for them.
2. Realizing that Christians are fighting a powerful enemy, we must take extreme care in how we raise our children. Public education for the most part is humanistic. Television offers little that is of value, and much that contradicts godly values. The friends our children play with may come from homes with no spiritual training. Don't allow the world to be the sole influence in raising your children. What things are you doing---besides sending your children off to Sunday School---to instill godly standards in them? Do they know how God desires them to respond? Use every chance you can to help them evaluate situations from a biblical viewpoint and encourage them to respond accordingly.