

Bethel Discipleship Series

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The Word of God says a great deal about the home and the relationship of family members.

The divine order of the family is often ridiculed and misunderstood by the world.

The constantly changing trends and philosophies of the world are often contrary to Biblical principles.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. God's scriptural order for the family is based upon a divine fundamental principle – that each person prefer the other more than himself or herself.

- **Romans 12:10** – “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”

1. The phrase “*preferring one another*” in Romans 12:10 means “*to show deference to,*” “*to submit to.*”

B. This principle is not necessarily a popular one, nor is it frequently practiced in our society today.

1. However, society's popular and “enlightened” philosophies on family relationships have led to millions of divorces, broken homes, and children raised by one parent.

C. We have a choice to make – adopt the world's philosophies and reap the same results that they reap, or accept God's principles and rely upon Him to build our home.

- **Psalm 127:1** – “*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*”

D. God's plan for the family can be clearly seen in our scripture reading, Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4. The Bible teaches that although the roles of husbands, wives, and children are very different from each other, they are equally important.

E. If we desire God's blessing in an area of our lives, then we must also submit to God's plan in that area. Failing to submit to God's instructions removes us from God's commitment to bless or protect us.

SCRIPTURE TEXTS:

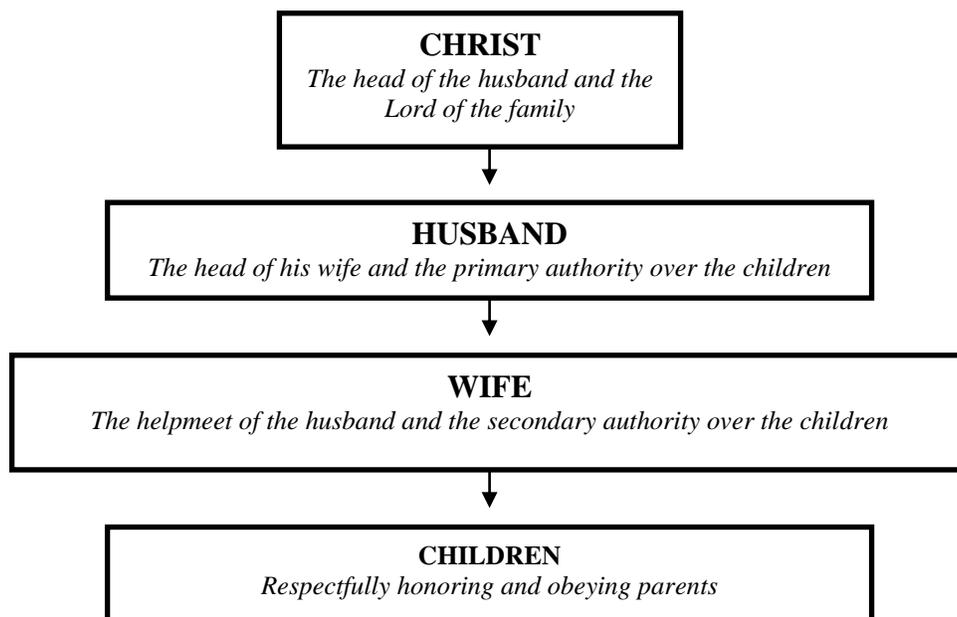
Ephesians 5:22-6:4

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. 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. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

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1. This is the choice that Moses gave unto the people of Israel when he gave them the commandments of God on Mt. Sinai.
 - **Deuteronomy 11:27-28** – “A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.”
2. This is also the admonition of the apostle Peter to us, instructing us that we should be obedient to God’s Word and not fashion or model our lifestyle or behavior according to the world out of which we have been delivered.
 - **1 Peter 1:13-16** – “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, *Be ye holy; for I am holy.*”
3. The world has its philosophies and traditions concerning family relationships – but the kingdom of God has its own divine arrangement and order.

II. THE DIVINE ORDER OF THE FAMILY



III. JESUS CHRIST – HEAD AND LORD OF ALL

- A. Jesus Christ is Lord of all – there is nothing and no one who supercedes His authority and power. Understanding the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ is crucial to our understanding of His divine order for the family. If we are His disciples, then we are not in charge of our own lives – He is!
 - **Acts 10:36** – “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ:

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- (he is Lord of all)."*
- **Colossians 1:18** – *"And he (Jesus Christ) is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*
(See also Acts 2:32-36; Philippians 2:5-11; Rev. 1:8)
- B. Jesus Christ gave His life for the church, demonstrating the highest form of love (Greek – *agape*: self-sacrificial love). He loved the church before it existed. He gave His own life that the church might be born!
- **Romans 5:8** – *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*
 - **1 John 3:16** – *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."*
- C. Jesus Christ has the preeminence in all things – we need to acknowledge and submit to His absolute authority in all areas of our lives, including our family relationships.
- D. We can be sure that because of His unquestionable love for us, His blueprint for our family will not harm us, but will bring the best possible good to our lives.

IV. THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF THE HUSBAND/FATHER

- A. Scripture teaches that the husband is the head of the wife and the primary authority over the children. It specifically indicates that the husband's responsibility to his wife is to love and honor her.
- **Ephesians 5:25-29** – *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."*
- B. In this passage the Christian husband is repeatedly instructed to love his wife.
1. These scripture verses make exclusive use of the Greek word, *agape*, indicating that the husband's love for his wife is to be a selfless, giving, sacrificial type of love.
 2. This scripture uses Jesus Christ and His relationship to the church as the role model for a husband's relationship with His wife.
 3. How did Jesus demonstrate His *agape*-love to the church?
 - He considered the church's needs before His own needs.
 - He gave His own life for the church.
 - He guides His church firmly in love; strongly and resolutely but with great care and gentleness.
 - He continually protects His church, provides for His church, nurtures His church, and cherishes His church.
 4. The New Testament never gives the husband the right to be selfish, tyrannical, overbearing, cruel, or oppressive. It teaches the exact opposite – everything a husband does should emanate out of his deep love and concern for his wife and family. The Biblical husband always puts his wife and family first.

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5. Again we see the underlying divine principle displayed – “*preferring one another.*”
 6. The husband's duty is to portray the nature and character of Christ to his wife. As a spiritual leader, he should be a man who prays, studies the Bible, is honest, is faithful to the church and to his wife, and a man who tries his best to show the love of Christ to his family.
- C. Second, the husband is also charged to honor and to esteem his wife.
- **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.*”
1. This scripture specifically teaches us:
 - a. The husband should live with his wife according to knowledge; endeavoring to understand her, knowing who and what she is and being aware of her needs.
 - b. The husband should give honor (respect, dignity, esteem) to his wife.
 - c. He should treat his wife gently and tenderly as he would treat a delicate treasure. Relationships are fragile – love, trust, and respect are difficult to regain after they have been lost.
 - d. The husband should carry the weight of those burdens and responsibilities that the wife is unable to bear and not place undue burdens, obligations, or encumbrances upon her.
 - e. The husband and wife are co-heirs of God's grace – they are *equal* inheritors of God's heritage.
 - f. If the husband does not honor and treat his wife with the correct respect and esteem, his prayers will be hindered (cut off, stopped).
 2. The behavior of a husband toward his wife should be characterized by great respect and dignity, showing genuine appreciation to her. Criticizing or joking about a wife privately or publicly is directly contrary to this command. We should never make jokes about our spouse – even in “good fun.”
 3. The Christian husband is instructed to recognize his wife as a virtuous woman, a valuable treasure. She is a priceless benefit to her husband, and the husband should acknowledge her as such.
 - **Proverbs 31:10-11** – “*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.*”
 - **Proverbs 12:4** – “*A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.*”

“*virtuous*” (Hebrew – *chayil*) – a force, an army, wealth, virtue, valor, strength
 4. The greatest strength of the godly woman is her virtuous character and lifestyle – with it she honors God, her husband, and her family, and she is a living testimony of divine obedience to both angels and mankind.
- D. The husband and higher authorities

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1. Husbands are instructed to be submissive and obedient to the authority placed over them (God, the church, the employer, the government, etc.), just as Christ was submissive, even unto death. It is important to note that submissiveness is not only required of wives – it is also required of husbands.

- **Hebrews 13:17** – “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves...”
- **James 4:7** – “Submit yourselves therefore to God...”
- **1 Peter 2:13-15** – “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

E. The husband's role with his children

1. The father's responsibility to his children is to bring them up to love and serve the Lord.

- **Ephesians 6:4** – “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

2. The Christian father must take care not to incite anger in his children by behaving in ways that are uncaring, unfair, overbearing or unreasonable. Children will not always understand the actions, decisions, and guidelines established by their parents, but the godly father searches his heart to be sure that he is doing what he truly believes to be best for his children.

3. Fathers are to nurture (tutor, train) their children

- a. “Nurture” (Greek – *paidea*) – education or training; disciplinary correction or chastisement.

- b. A father who does not both train and discipline (teach and show) his children is neglecting his God-ordained duty.

- **Deuteronomy 6:4-8** – “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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.”

- c. Children need to hear their father teach them the principles of God – they need to hear his voice teach them the principles of the Word. They need to hear him pray, see him read his Bible, watch him worship in church. They need to see him treat other brothers and sisters with courtesy and respect. They need to see him obey his spiritual and civic leaders.

- d. While truth must be *taught*, it must also be *caught*. Children “catch” truth when it is lived honestly before them. Actions always speak louder than words, especially to children.

4. Fathers are to admonish their children.

“Admonish” (Greek – *nouthesia*) – calling attention to; mild rebuke or warning; to encourage.

- **Proverbs 3:12** – “*For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*”

- a. Fathers are to admonish, rebuke, warn, and encourage their children in a firm, but gentle way.

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- b. Discipline should be applied consistently and without uncontrolled anger. Correction should be administered out of love and in an encouraging, positive way.
 - c. When a man fathers a child, that child becomes his responsibility. If the father is uncertain or unsure of proper and correct fathering techniques, then he should earnestly seek God and study the Word that he may become the father that God expects him to be.
 - **James 1:5** – *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”*
5. Fathers are responsible to protect their children, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Just as a father would defend his children against robbers entering a home, he should not allow other things in the home that would cause harm to his family.
- **Deuteronomy 7:26** – *“Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.”*
- a. In today’s culture of electronic media, there are an increasing number of enticements that can be destructive to a child’s (or an adult’s) spiritual and emotional health.
 - Television
 - Movies, videos, DVD’s
 - Rock music (in its various manifestations)
 - Computer games
 - The Internet
 - Parties, clubs, sleepovers
 - b. It is the father’s responsibility to make sure that the entertainment and educational activities in which his children are involved are wholesome and beneficial ones. Fathers are accountable to God that they have taught their children the *right* things and protected them from the *wrong* things.
6. Fathers are to love their children.
- **Psalm 103:13** – *“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”*
“pitieth” (Hebrew – *racham*) – to love, especially compassionate, merciful love.
- a. There is a God-given bond of love and affection that is supposed to exist within families. The home is intended to be a place of happiness, warmth and love. Much of this environment is created by how a father expresses his love to his children.
 - b. Notice how Paul refers to this type of unconditional love in Romans 12.
 - **Romans 12:10** – *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; ...”*
“kindly affectioned” (Greek – *philostorgos*) – cherishing one’s kindred, especially parents or children; fond of natural relatives.

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- F. All fathers will answer to God for the manner in which they conduct their family relationships – whether or not they honored their wives and raised their children according to scriptural instruction.
- G. The father, as head of the household, is also responsible to provide for the natural needs of his family. The scripture makes this “natural provision” a spiritual issue.
 - *1 Timothy 5:8* – “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

V. THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF THE WIFE/MOTHER

- *Ephesians 5:22* – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”
- A. It has already been established that the wife should receive honor, respect and love in the family relationship. However, the scripture also indicates that there are responsibilities and duties assigned to her.
 - *Colossians 3:18* – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit (proper, correct) in the Lord.”
- B. Submission is one of the most beautiful and powerful concepts in the New Testament. It means to yield intelligent, willing obedience to an ordained power or authority – and *all* disciples are instructed to be in submission to others.
 1. The New Testament clearly teaches that the wife should have a deferential spirit toward her husband. The husband and wife should work together making major decisions, but when there is a difference of opinion, the scripture instructs that the wife should defer to her husband.
 2. The wife’s submission is not to be demanded by the husband. Submission should be given, not taken. However, scriptural principles indicate that refusing to submit to a God-given authority is the same as refusing to submit to God.
 3. As we have already seen, the Bible also teaches submission to one another.
 - *Ephesians 5:21* – “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”
 - *1 Peter 5:5* – “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”
 4. In scripture, submission, in one way or another, is required of all believers!
- C. The wife is also instructed to reverence her husband – to treat him with respect, admiration, awe and esteem. To better understand this, we will look at both the KJV and the Amplified Bible versions.
 - *Ephesians 5:33* – “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”
 - *Ephesians 5:33 (Amplified Bible)* – “However, let each man of you (without exception) love his wife as his very own flesh; and let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband – that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates and esteems him, and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly.”
- D. What about the unsaved husbands or wives? Do the same principles still apply?

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- **1 Peter 3:1-2** – “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any (husband) obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation (behavior) of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.”
1. The word “*conversation*” (Greek – *anastrophe*) – conduct, behavior or manner of life.
 2. This scripture teaches us that the godly behavior of a wife is a powerful tool in bringing the unsaved husband to salvation. An unsaved husband is more likely to be won by what he observes rather than by what he hears from his spouse. The same is also true in a situation where the husband obeys God while the wife does not.
 3. In submitting to any authority, God’s Word always supercedes any human authority. When a choice has to be made, we must always choose to submit to God first. If our spouse requests us to do something against the Word of God, we must choose to obey God first.
- **Acts 5:29** – “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”
4. The Christian who has an unsaved spouse must do his or her best to fulfill the scriptural commands concerning family relationships regardless of what his or her spouse chooses to do.
- E. The mother is also responsible for nurturing and training her children. The major responsibility of the management of the home is placed in the charge of the wife and mother.
- **Titus 2:4-5** – “That they (the older women) may teach the young women to be sober (sound-minded), to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet (moderate, self-controlled), chaste (pure), keepers at home (domestically inclined), good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”
- F. In describing the role of a wife and a mother, the book of Proverbs defines the characteristics and behavior of a “virtuous woman.”
- **Proverbs 31:10-31** – “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”
- Her value is above precious jewels
 - She is reliable and trustworthy
 - She is diligent in managing her household

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- She is industrious and hardworking
- She makes important decisions, such as buying and selling
- She is skillful in handling her duties and responsibilities
- She is known for her personal strength and honor
- She demonstrates wisdom
- Her words are kind
- Her children love and admire her
- Her husband loves and admires her

VI. THE SCRIPTURAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHILDREN

A. The role of children, as defined in the Bible, is simple and clear.

1. Obey – to listen to attentively; heed, and conform to the commands and wishes of the parents.

- **Proverbs 1:8** – “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.”
- **Colossians 3:20** – “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”
- **Proverbs 4:1** – “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.”
- **Proverbs 13:1** – “A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.”

a. In the Bible, disobedience in children was a very serious offence. (Deuteronomy 18:18-21; Exodus 21:15, 17; Leviticus 20:9)

b. When we, as children, rebel against or disobey our parents, it is the same as if we are rebelling against God and disobeying Him.

2. Honor – to treat our parents with great esteem and high regard.

- **Ephesians 6:1-3** – “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.” (See also Deuteronomy 5:16)

a. It is a direct Biblical command that children show respect and honor to their parents. This is the first commandment of God that has a promise attached to it.

b. Children should not treat their parents with disrespect, ridicule, mock, scorn, or curse them.

- **Matthew 15:4** – (Jesus said) “For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.”
- **Proverbs 20:20** – “Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp (figurative: light of life) shall be put out in obscure darkness.”
- **Deuteronomy 27:16** – “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.”

“setteth light” – (Hebrew *-qalah*) – to despise, to hold in contempt, to despise or disdain.

B. These scriptures do not just apply to young children. Adults as well as children have a scriptural obligation to honor their parents and treat them with dignity and respect, even in their later years.

- **Proverbs 23:22** – “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is

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old.”

- C. However, when a man and woman marry and become “man and wife,” they leave the authority of their parents and establish a new family unit independent of their own parents’ authority.
- **Genesis 2:24** – “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

VII. NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILIES

- A. For various reasons, not everyone in the church is part of a traditional family structure. However, divorce, single parenthood, widowhood, and singleness, also existed in Biblical times.
- The Samaritan woman had been married five times and was now living with a man who was not her husband when Jesus met her at the well. (John 4:5-26)
 - Divorce was not unknown in the Bible. Although the Word specifically disapproves of divorce, it was known even from the times of Moses. (Matthew 19:7-8)
 - Widows and fatherless children are frequently mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. Instructions were given in scripture to treat these women and fatherless children with kindness and benevolence. (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:17; 29:19-21; 26:12-13; 27:19; 2 Samuel 14:5; 1 Kings 17:9; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Matthew 23:14; Luke 4:25; Luke 7:12; 18:3; 21:2; Acts 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; James 1:27)
 - The apostle Paul does not forbid marriage but suggests that it is a good thing when single individuals choose to remain single (as was he) and to give themselves totally to the work of God. (1 Corinthians 7:8, 34, 40)
- B. There are many types of non-traditional families in the world today – some of these are approved in scripture and some are not. Each one must be evaluated and judged according to scriptural principles.
- C. Let us always remember that God can be whatever we need Him to be, and that we are all part of a great family where God is our father, the church is our mother, and we have brothers and sisters all over the world.
- **Psalm 68:5** – “A father of the fatherless, and a judge (protector) of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.”
 - **Psalm 68:6** – “God setteth the solitary in families: ...”
- D. If we are single or part of a single-parent family, we must do our best to fulfill our family role as it is outlined in scripture and ask God to make up the difference. He is more than able to do His part if we do ours!
- E. In all family relationships we must remember that our role is not to be “served” but to “serve.” Our responsibility is to fulfill God’s purpose and instructions that others may be blessed through us.

Note: Additional resources related to this lesson are listed at end of *The Gifts of the Spirit* lesson.

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