

The Christian's responsibilities

Part 3

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[00:00:01] Now will you turn please to the Epistle to the Ephesians, Chapter 5.

Epistle to the Ephesians, Chapter 5, and verse 22.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord, 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 Savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.

Verse 31.

[00:01:01] For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they too 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.

Honor 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.

We will look at other scriptures as we go along, very important scriptures too.

[00:02:08] The exercise for tonight is natural relationships and how they have to be viewed as belonging to God and centered in God or in Christ.

And this is extremely important that at the very outset we establish that relationships are of God and should be maintained according to the standard that God gives to us in his precious word. So we're going back again to the Garden of Eden to see God the creator and the relationships that he established. And again I say it's most important to view things in that light. First of all, the man coming direct from the hands of God, created in his image and likeness.

[00:03:06] Marvelous creation. A creation that was able to respond to God intelligently, able to directly

appreciate God in a way that the animals never could.

And you young people at school, when they tell you that man is just an animal, like other animals, don't believe it because it's not true. The man came directly from the hands of God. God breathed into him the breath of life. He became a living soul, intelligent to respond to God in a way that the other creation, the other preachers, could never do. Man was made to look up and appreciate God and respond to him.

Indeed, the old catechism told us that man's chief end was to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[00:04:04] That's the man.

Then God created a helpmate for Adam.

He saw that there was no satisfaction for Adam in all the creatures that were around. And so he made a woman, taking a rib from Adam, and created the woman that she might be for him.

And so at the very beginning, we find God established a natural relationship, and that principle still holds good today. One man, one woman.

And that relationship is God-made, not man-made, and this is what God delights in when this is maintained according to his mind and will. The man, unfortunately, after the fall, was to rule over the woman, something that wasn't stated at the beginning. [00:05:01] The woman was to be a helpmate for him, a complement of him, one who could be with him and satisfy his heart. Unfortunately, sin came in, and we find this added thing that he is to rule over her, and she is to be subservient to him. Not in a tyrannical way. That's never in scripture. Not in a tyrannical way. But in the order of creation that God has given, this is the woman's place in relation to the man. And if that's put out of that order, if it's destroyed, if it's rejected, if it's disobeyed, it can only produce sorrow. Well then, there is the man and the woman, a human relationship, but God-given, and can find its true satisfaction when both live in relation to God.

Both were directly responsible to God, and then as husband and wife collectively were responsible to God. [00:06:04] And then the children came along, Cain and Abel.

Given by God, this was God's way to continue the human life upon earth, and he made the man and the woman that this could be so. And so those two sons were born, and the parents were directly responsible to God in the upbringing of their offspring.

A divinely given relationship, and so again I say, responsible to God to bring their children up for God in the way he made himself known to them at that time. And then Cain and Abel, in their responsibility, were directly responsible to God to answer to their parents.

So here is another divine relationship, a natural relationship rather, divinely given. [00:07:03] And that's something that we take account of. And then lastly, there was the responsibility of Cain to Abel, and Abel to Cain. A brotherly relationship, a natural relationship, and both were responsible to God in their attitude to each other. Now it seems to me it's extremely important to go right back to the beginning and see the natural relationships that God established. And not only were they established for the benefit of those upon earth, but were established that they might respond to God in those

relationships. And that is true right through the Bible to the very end. Now we come to New Testament teaching, and there is a tremendous amount of teaching in relation to this matter of husband and wife.

[00:08:01] As we said in prayer, it was a joy to the Lord Jesus to go to certain homes. The home Bethany was one particular home where he was welcome.

They made him a supper.

A united effort, not husband and wife, two sisters and a brother, but nevertheless a home where the Lord was welcome. But we'll see in a moment that there are families in the Bible, husbands and wives, who really do please the Lord. Anyway, it's important to see what the scripture says in New Testament teaching regarding this important matter of a home. A home regulated for God, and regulated too for their own natural enjoyment.

Let me say this at the very outset. That the homes of the saints are the real barriers in the opposing of worldly principles and worldly ideas.

[00:09:06] That what pertains to the gathered company of the church should pertain in relation to the home. That there isn't a standard for the home that you can make yourself. There should be a standard maintained in the home that will find its outlet when we gather together in the assembly. And of course that applies to individuals who haven't homes. But all that we are naturally should provide or should provide substance so that it finds an outlet when we come together. The two things are not separate in the sense that they're not connected. What pertains to the home affects the assembly. We'll see that later on. And so these homes are to be governed so that they contribute to the upkeep of that which is pleasurable to the Lord. And that's why we find so much instruction in the epistles to this great matter. [00:10:04] Well then first of all I want to draw your attention to 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 15.

It's important that we read these because you'll remember them better than anything I say.

I'm particularly concerned about the end of verse 15.

There's a lot in the portion that could be read as to the adornment and to women learning in silence.

And not to use up authority over the man. That's all important. And we're told that Adam was first formed then Eve and Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgression. And then there's a reference, very encouraging indeed, notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing. [00:11:01] Then it goes on to say if they continue in faith and love and holiness with sobriety.

Now this was impressed upon my heart that here are four things that can mark a home. Notice it says if they continue, that is husband and wife together, continue marked by faith, marked by love, marked by sobriety.

I've just forgotten the other one. It shows how my poor mind slips so easy. Let me read it correctly. Chapter 2, verse 15. If they continue in faith, love and holiness with sobriety.

I don't need to tell you that you can look in vain in the homes of unconverted people for features like that. Yes, you might find natural love, thank God that that still exists and owned by God. [00:12:06] Unnatural affection is one of the marks of the last days. Disobedient to children and disobedient to parents, another mark of the last days.

And so we can see that what pertains in the home is very, very important in the sight of God. Here we find these four things, faith, love, holiness and sobriety.

I don't think any Christian home can be successfully ordered for God unless these four features are in attendance. These four features are being practiced. Faith. There are many trials in the Christian home. I don't need to tell a company like this. We are not very long married before there are trials of one kind and another of material character. And in other ways too, pressures come upon the company, the husband and wife. [00:13:03] And so the exercise of faith is so important that there might be faith in God.

He established the relationship and he is the one who can maintain it. And I believe that's absolutely necessary in the days in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately, what is prevailing in the world is spilling over into the Christian profession and the marriage bond is being given up. And oh, how important it is that the exercise of faith, faith in God by husband and wife is practiced so that there might be power to withstand the encroachments of the enemy in the world and its influences into the home and to maintain what is right and proper before God. And then we find this matter of holiness.

Holiness. Oh, what a tremendous matter that is. [00:14:03] Holiness. Holiness practiced in the home.

To use a human expression, it's so easy to let the hair down in the home. Pardon the expression. So easy to let the defenses down in the home. So easy to say, well, I'm in my home, it doesn't really matter how I conduct myself. Oh, no. God says holiness should mark the home.

Holiness of conduct, holiness of conversation, holiness of thought.

What's proper to the church should be in the home, holiness. And so what we say and what we do and our actions and our transactions mark by holiness.

As we've said already in these meetings, an abhorrence of evil. And then it speaks about love.

Now, I believe principally this is love towards each other. [00:15:02] It certainly cannot omit love towards God or love towards Christ or love towards Christians or love towards unconverted people. But a marriage bond in its natural way is cemented together by love for each other.

Where there is true love, God-given love.

This is the great matter. It's God who has given this kind of love in the human heart to be active towards each other. And that's a great barrier indeed against the wiles of the enemy. And if they continue in that, then there will be something for God. No doubt at all that it involves much more what I've mentioned. Love to God, to Christ, to the saints and also to the unconverted. But if there isn't love towards each other, there's going to be a great deal of niggling and suspicion and distance and all that kind of thing. Which will eventually bring a complete breakdown and eventually separation. [00:16:04] Now, God doesn't want that kind of thing. He wants the man and the woman to be together

in love. Love for each other.

And that's what Paul says in Ephesians that we read together. Husbands, love your wives.

And the direct responsibility of every home rests very squarely upon the shoulders of the husband. If he is the head, and the Bible says that he is the head, then the onus in the running of his house rests upon him. And of course, if the wife is true to what God created at the beginning, she's a helpmate. Then she'll be behind her husband and will help him and support him. And to fall in with what's God given and obviously what is pleasing to God.

It's one of the saddest things that we find in the Christian testimony. That a godless sister will be held up by an unspiritual husband. [00:17:03] Or a spiritual husband will be held up by an unspiritual wife. But wonderful when we find both working together.

Both desiring to do the will of the Lord. Continuing in faith, in love, in holiness, and in sobriety.

Now that doesn't mean that we don't drink alcoholic beverages. I hope that we don't.

Better if we continually refuse such things because there is great danger in them. Many an alcoholic arrived there through beginning with social drinking. And then getting a taste for this kind of thing. And developing more and more and more until the person is an alcoholic. Now Paul says, if this eating meat offends my brother, then I won't eat meat. And he says there are many things that are lawful to me, but many things that are not expedient. [00:18:02] And I would class alcoholic drink in the line of that which is not expedient. And better if we keep clear of it. But that's not the meaning of sobriety. The meaning of sobriety is doing what is reasonable, doing what is proper in the sight of God. A sober mind, able to think rightly in relation to the things of God.

Well now, isn't that wonderful to have a house governed by those four principles? Faith, love, holiness, sobriety.

On for one or two evenings and then put them off for a expediency. I know, they continue, they govern the household. Wonderful, wonderful place to be in such a home.

And it's not only a beautiful picture hanging on the wall. Thank God it is being realized in many, many homes. [00:19:02] And thank God they are a barrier against the encroachment of evil. There's one other scripture I want to draw your attention to. 1 Peter chapter 3.

It's important that we look them up and see what the word of God says. 1 Peter chapter 3.

Verse 5.

No, I will read from verse 4.

But let it be the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price. Then it goes on to say, for after this manner in the old time, the holy women also who trusted in God, adorned themselves being in subjection unto their own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him Lord, [00:20:03] whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye

husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered. That your prayers be not hindered.

Here is an extremely important feature for the Christian home, prayer.

Now Peter says, I want you to have certain features attaching to you, both husband and wife. And he says, I don't want your prayers hindered. Maybe that we wonder, why are our prayers not answered? We pray so often about so many things, why are these prayers not answered? It may be that we haven't answered to the things that are mentioned by Peter, [00:21:02] that neither husband or wife add up to those qualifications or those features that should be with them, consequently their prayers are hindered. That would be the opposite of what Peter is saying. That your prayers be not hindered. My, that's wonderful.

To see a Christian couple bowing their knees together in prayer.

I know it's not always possible, and husband may rise very early in the morning, and there may be many other reasons why they can't kneel down together in the morning. But if they can't do it in the morning, they can do it at night. Or they can do it at any convenient time. But it's one of the essentials of the Christian home, is prayer. And my, it's a very, very powerful thing.

To spend a little time in praying about the assembly that you're connected with. Praying about relatives, we're talking about natural relationships. [00:22:02] Praying for relatives that are not converted. Praying for neighbors that they might be interested in relation to divine things. Praying for the Lord's servants. Praying for missionary work. Praying for all kinds of service connected with the Lord's name. Here is a tremendous field for prayer. And of course, the more knowledge that we have about the Lord's interests, the more effectual our prayers will be. And the more interesting they'll be to us too. So gather up every piece of knowledge that you can possibly find, and present that to the Lord in prayer. That your prayers together.

Not the husband praying in his room, and the wife praying in her room, but praying together.

Kneeling down together. Acknowledging the greatness of God, and the wonderful privilege of being together, and taking part in this great service of prayer. [00:23:01] I think that's extremely important. So if we can just think of those five features. Faith.

Love. Holiness.

Sobriety.

Prayers.

And then ask ourselves, are these things in my home?

Well if they aren't, it's high time they were. Because the word of God clearly indicates that that's what should be in our homes. And as we've seen in Ephesians 5, love the husband's responsibility to love the wife's responsibility to be subject to her husband. As head, he seeks to direct her into the things that are pleasing to the Lord. I said we would mention families that exhibited this kind of feature that's

pleasing to the Lord. And my, we cannot do better than refer to Priscilla and Aquila.

What a wonderful couple they were. [00:24:02] Thoroughly devoted to the interests of the Lord. United together.

Always together.

As far as my memory is concerned, I don't think there was an occasion where they're mentioned without being together. It's always Priscilla and Aquila, or Aquila and Priscilla. They're together, and they're serving the Lord. They were a great help to Paul. They were a great help to Apollos. And they really worked for the Lord. They laid down their neck for the interests of the saints. They were together in it. Well, that's a wonderful feature. And thank God that is a living reality today.

There are homes where husband and wife are united, thoroughly united, in the interests of the Lord. And, too, love and headship recognized.

Recognized, yes, these things are in practice. They're not just nice pictures in the Bible. [00:25:01] Well, then, we come now to parents.

And to children.

It's a very high standard that the Scripture puts upon the obedience of children. Very, very high standard indeed.

You would notice it says in Ephesians chapter 6, Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

In the Lord.

Not simply be obedient to your parents. That's excellent.

But to be obedient to your parents in the Lord. I believe believing children and believing parents. So that the obedience is rendered in that context. My, that's a marvelous standard.

I listened to a little boy today. I don't think his parents are Christians.

I may be wrong, of course. [00:26:02] But I was very, very impressed by the mannerliness of that little boy. The way he spoke.

His manners were impeccable. My, it's very wonderful to see a little boy being brought up with manners like that in this discourteous world. The way he spoke was just a tribute to the way he'd been brought up. He was mannerly.

Now, in a greater way, to see children obedient to their parents.

Because they know it's in the Lord. Their parents belong to the Lord. They belong to the Lord. And they do it for that reason. I remember hearing about a young sister in Germany.

Who dressed in a certain way. Who had her hair in a certain way. And it impressed the young man to

such an extent. That he asked her why she was dressed in this particular way. And why she wore her hair in this particular way. [00:27:02] She wasn't like the other students. Or she said, I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm a Christian. Oh, he says, you've got to do it. Oh, no.

She says, I do it because I love the Lord. Now, that's true obedience. And so children, if they obey their parents. Not simply to do it in a technical kind of way. It's the right thing to do. But to do it because the Lord wants them to do it. Well, that's the best possible standard. That's what the Bible says. To obey in the Lord.

And we can remember this. That we have the most wonderful example. In the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Think of any boy or any girl.

Being obedient.

In the same way as the Lord Jesus was obedient. It says he was obedient. He went down and was obedient to his parents. A dear brother well known to us all. [00:28:01] Who had a very, very difficult time with his parents. When he was first converted. And they put him under all kinds of pressure. So bad that he decided to leave home.

And so he went to an old brother in Port Seton. And he asked his advice.

And the brother said, go and do as the Lord Jesus did. Be obedient subject to your parents.

And he did. And he never regretted it. And so a very wonderful opportunity there is for young children. To obey their parents. And please God.

Cain and Abel were directly responsible to Adam and Eve.

Oh, what a sorrow Cain was to his parents.

Dear children. Don't be a sorrow to your parents. Obey them.

Follow their advice in the Lord.

[00:29:01] They're concerned about your spiritual welfare. Abel, I'm perfectly sure, was a joy to Adam and Eve.

He offered up the right sacrifice. Obviously taught by Adam and perhaps by Eve too. And he did what was pleasing to God. And I'm sure it pleased his parents. Dear children.

Think about the love that your parents have for you. And the desire that they have for you to follow in the way that's pleasing to God. Don't act in such a way that you bring disgrace upon your parents. And particularly upon the name of the Lord.

There was a man who did this.

Isaac, he was a pleasure to his parents.

Esau deliberately did something that he knew would cause his parents sorrow.

Did not consider for their feelings in one little bit.

[00:30:03] Deliberately married, as we would say today, an unconverted person. And did exactly the opposite of his parents' desires. Could almost say, I want to hurt them as much as I possibly can. What a hateful attitude.

And so dear friends, it's a very, very wonderful thing. When children are obedient to their parents in the Lord. Hophni, Phinehas, they were a disgrace to their parents. A disgrace to Eli.

A disgrace in divine things and a disgrace in moral things. Know what sorrow they brought to the heart of Eli. How sad it is to see children obeying in this way. But very, very delightful indeed. To see children acting in such a way as to be an encouragement to their parents. We ought to say this too in relation to husbands particularly.

[00:31:02] Because we said what pertains to the home certainly pertains to the assembly. And there's a scripture that we cannot bypass. And it's, if a man can't rule his own house, he can't rule in the church of God. Now, you can't bypass that.

Plain statement from the word of God. If a man cannot rule his own home and direct it for the pleasure of God. Then he's disqualified from having any part in ruling the church. Now, that's the word of God that says that, not me. And we cannot bypass the word of God. And we find too that elders and deacons are given instructions.

And the qualifications are extremely high. And they're to be right individually. And they're to be right in their home. And they're to be right in the assembly. And they're to be right in the world. My, my.

Very, very great qualifications.

[00:32:03] But the home we're talking about tonight, right in the home. And then there is a good testimony. So that nobody speaks about those Christians. Look how they behave in the home. It says that the word of God might not be slandered. The word of God might not be despised. Because of the conduct in the home. And that's what happened in Eli's day. The behavior was so bad.

Those two sons, the behavior was so bad.

That the very offerings were despised. The testimony in approach to God was despised.

Very, very sad thing indeed.

And then too it says in connection with those people, the elders and the deacons.

That their homes are to be right. That the ministry might not be blamed in any way. [00:33:02] There might not be any disrespect shown to the things that belong to the Lord. And so dear friends, a very careful examination shows the importance of the home.

In relation to the working out of the assembly. For a few minutes I want to speak about the responsibility of say brothers to brothers.

And I don't know a better portion to consider than Joseph.

Joseph was ill treated by his brethren.

Badly treated.

They showed no respect to him whatsoever.

No respect for him whatsoever.

And as you know he was sold as a slave.

And became the head in Egypt.

[00:34:01] And then his brethren came to him. And oh what a wonderful opportunity Joseph had. Of dealing with them in a way that they deserved. But he didn't show any spirit of vengeance. He showed the spirit of forgiveness. And when they were very, very much concerned about what they had done. When they realized that this was Joseph.

My, they were affrighted indeed.

But he says it was God who did all this.

Now he says I want to do the best for you. Oh what an attitude.

In families it's so easy for envy and distance.

To creep in and unhappiness caused in the family. Because of this kind of thing. Special favorites.

Oh how sad it can be in a home.

But here is Joseph who is governed by affection for his brothers.

[00:35:03] And he had no right to be affectionate in a natural way. But he was.

And he was forgiving. He was kind, considerate. And he did all that he could to be a blessing to his brethren. I think that was a wonderful attitude. What a hateful attitude the brothers showed towards him. Because it was obvious he was a favorite. And had every right to be a favorite. Because he was making some progress in doing what was right to his father. And obviously to God.

That of course didn't in any way make him on a pedestal above everybody else. But there was something special about Joseph that pleased his father. What a hateful spirit they showed towards him. Of anger and envy and jealousy.

Now when he got the chance, he showed them love.

And it's very, very fine to see this attitude between brothers and sisters in any family. [00:36:05] Acting towards each other with that fineness of feeling that is so pleasing to God. This is what Cain failed in.

Am I my brother's keeper, he said. And God would say to him, yes you are. You're the elder brother. You should be setting an example. You should be concerned about doing what's right towards your brother. And in some measure he was his brother's keeper. He should have been acting towards his brother in a brotherly way. But he didn't.

And he was murderous and cruel. And he killed his brother. But we find in the Minor Prophets, there is a reference made to those who forgot the brotherly covenant. Forgot that there was a certain relationship in which they were. That demanded they should act towards their brethren in a right and proper way. And in a higher sense, in the assembly that's true for each of us. We're all brethren in Christ. [00:37:02] And we are to act towards each other as brethren. But we're talking particularly about the family circle. Now one last reference. And it's a very important one. And that is widows.

There are many widows amongst the saints. And they have to be cared for.

And very special references are made in the New Testament as to their care. The different qualifications that mark them. And they are very precious to the heart of God. For true religion and undefiled before God and the Father is to be kind to the widows and the children. To visit them in their affliction. And so God puts a great stress indeed on the widows.

And I think it's very, very important to remember that just before the Lord was born. It wasn't a company of young people that was waiting for him. [00:38:01] It was elderly people. The young people weren't there. There was Anna. There was Zacharias and Elizabeth. The elderly people, old Simeon too. There they were and oh how they responded when the angels spoke to them. So we're deeply thankful for what the scripture says about widows. They should be cared for. They should be a matter for concern. And so these are natural relationships owned by God, given by God. And to be followed up as far as we are able in the power of the spirit in relation to the Christian company. Every Christian company is made up of individuals. Husband and wife, children.

Now just let us think for a moment of a husband and wife who don't speak to each other because of some disagreeableness. And they go along to the breaking of bread. [00:39:03] Is it a light matter that can be ignored simply because they're husband and wife? Oh it will sort itself out. Not for one moment.

The regulations that are laid down for us in Matthew 5 would apply. Get these matters settled before you bring your gift to the altar. And so it's extremely important that husband and wife are right with each other and before the Lord in relation to the remembrance of the Lord. Then say there is continual strife in the home and there isn't that attitude of love. That will spill over into the assembly. It's bound to.

And so how right it is that husband and wife are right before the Lord with each other and working together harmoniously. And two in relation to children in the family circle, exactly the same. There is no exemption because we belong to a family that we can please ourselves in what we say and what we do. [00:40:07] No dear friends, husband and wife, children, if they're breaking bread and if they're Christians, then it's extremely important that what applies to them and applies to others, what applies to others applies to them. There should be that rectitude of life before the Lord in those natural

relationships so that what pertains to the assembly is not affected in an adverse way.

And so I think you will see that the homes of the saints are extremely important, extremely important. I was reading to a brother Robert Burns's poem, The Cotter's Saturday Night.

And would to God that what the poet described were true today in the homes in Scotland and also in the homes in England. [00:41:02] And then after the supper was finished, the father, the husband, gets the old family Bible and begins to read it and read it to his wife and to his children and to the young man who was there. And after they were finished reading the Bible and saying something about it, they began to sing the songs of Zion and then they all kneeled down and prayed. Wonderful portrayal of life at that time in many a Christian home. Sad to say, not so many now.

But I believe that what the poet portrayed is what the scriptures represent. A home of love in natural things and a home given up to spiritual things and both of them in their own place before God. Natural and spiritual, both pleasing to God.

Now it's easy to talk about these things and it's easy to lay out divine principles as they're found in the Bible. [00:42:02] Not always so easy to work them out as in any divine thing. Oh, so easy to talk about them, but not so easy to put them into practice. But that responsibility rests on your shoulders and mine. If we have homes or even if we are individuals, the principles in the Bible are there to be obeyed. May we be encouraged for his namesake.