

Modern Family Life: Personal Observations and Reflections

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The things that I am about to present here are very personal in nature. They are addressed primarily to husbands and fathers. They are also very unconventional for our contemporary day. In fact, some may even find them quite extreme and shocking, if not outright “offensive.” They are not intended to be sensational, but are simply the result of years of personal struggle with modern family life in light of what I have learned from the Scripture about the family.

Please let me say up front that I do not offer these reflections as some form of higher “spiritual standard.” I do not desire to raise some type of “law” for the life of Christ in HIS Body. Nonetheless, I believe that there are principles that will be addressed here that merit the thoughtful and prayerful consideration of the family head.

For this reason, I am addressing this to family heads. For we are the ones who stand before the Lord, responsible as the heads of our homes. So, this is meant – more than anything else – to be an encouragement for us to re-evaluate the direction that our homes are going, and be emboldened to pursue a course different from that of our western gentile culture.

I believe that a family is intended, by divine design, to share their lives together. By that I mean that they should *live* together on a *daily* basis. Now, what I am talking about is not the norm for families (even Christian families) of our modern western culture. Let me explain.

The norm of most of history was that families would actually spend their lives together, day by day, every day – all day. They would spend their *entire* days together. Things that take up large blocks of daily time in western culture, such as education and business, were simply a part of *normal* family life. In fact, almost everything else was as well.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Modern western culture introduced some movements that would drastically change the nature of standard family life. First entered the *Industrial Revolution*, which engendered a “factory” mentality that *removed* the *HEAD* (husband/father) from the home for the *majority* of waking hours! The father would get up (often before the rest of the family), leave home, and go “off to work.” Counting work and travel time, he would come home with very little time or energy left for his family. The family was thus made practically “headless” for most of the waking hours.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Then came *Public Education*, which brought about a “classroom” mentality that *removed* the *CHILDREN* from their God-given authority and coverture for the *majority* of waking hours! Now, the children would get up, leave home, and go “off to school.” While at school they would have their lives shaped, trained, and influenced independent from the rest of the family, independent from the family head – by “outsiders” (secular or Christian! – and what is “Christian” about having others assume our own God-given responsibility?) Counting school, travel time, and then coming home to do “homework” for the educational system, they would have very little time left for the other members of the family. The family was thus made practically “childless” for most of the waking hours, and the wife/mother was left by herself at home.

THE WOMEN’S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Then arrived the *Women’s Movement*. With the “liberated female” mentality, now finally the *WIFE/MOTHER* was *removed* from the home for the *majority* of waking hours! (After all, no one else was at home with her anyway!) She would get up, leave home, and go “off to work.” Counting her work, travel time, and continued domestic responsibilities (cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.) she would have very little time *or energy* left for anyone! Now the family was made practically “motherless” for most of the waking hours.

THE EMPTY HOME

Now we have a “home” with *NO ONE* in it (excepted maybe a cat and a dog) for the *MAJORITY OF WAKING HOURS*! Does that sound like “family” as God intended it to be? – each “family member” off living their own personal independent daily life.

Next occurred the invention of “quality time” (whatever that is!). The family would “enjoy” this “quality time” at times like the evening family meal. This meal time took on a whole new significance and importance in the early “modern” times. Here the family could learn of each other’s separate, segregated, isolated, independent “day lives” (or at least the parts that anyone was willing to share). But this particular event, along with other evening family interaction was about to be brought to a screeching halt!

ENTERTAINMENT

Then appeared *television* (and later the computer!) Now the husband, the wife, and the children (all who have spent the majority of their waking hours *ISOLATED* and *AWAY* from each other) return home for an evening of muted “family togetherness” in front of a TV. Or, as progress and affluence allowed each family member to have their own TV (or computers!), finally this last strand of “family togetherness” was spent with each one in their own separate room! Thus, the story of the American family life!

As family heads, I think it is time that we consider these issues. Let us return to the Scriptures for a true assessment of God’s design for the home. Is the family life of the western culture as God intended it to be? In fact is it family *LIFE* at all?

CHURCHIANITY

At least there was the weekend – *BUT*: off to “church” we go! – the mad rush of busy activities “for the Lord.” Once again our modern western *religious* culture has managed to separate and isolate the family – this time in the name of Christ! First there is “Sunday School” where all the family is divvied up, each going their *own way*, independent of the rest of the family. While at “Sunday School” they would have their “spiritual” lives shaped, trained, and influenced independent of the family, independent of the family head – by family “outsiders” (and what is “Christian” about having others assume our own God-given responsibility?)

Then there is “children’s church,” and a host of other clubs, unions and programs (Awana, Vacation Bible School, etc.) that by design separates the family. Just where is the pattern for such activities found in the Bible? Dare we even question such firmly established norms? Have we come to value our religious traditions and customs so, that we cannot stop and reflect on their Scriptural basis? Just how Biblical are the concepts of “Sunday School” and “Children’s Church?” After thoughtfully reading the Bible, does not one begin to ask himself, for example, “What would Paul think about all our ‘improvements?’”

Just where do these western Sunday religious traditions and rituals find their roots and base? There is no biblical basis, but rather it is the forsaking of the Pauline tradition (II Thessalonians 3:6) and pattern (I Timothy 1:16) of “the church in thy house” (Romans 16:5; I Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). Family heads, do you not see the connection? There has been another abandoning of the home, this time for the man-made institution, so-called “the church.” Once again there is a leaving of the home environment – this time for supposed “spiritual life.”

This abandonment of the home for religion does not stop on Sunday, for there is a “good,” “spiritual” man’s commitment to the Monday night board meeting, Tuesday night choir practice, Wednesday night prayer meeting and Bible study, Thursday night visitation, Friday night youth programs, and Saturday “church” cleaning. The religious system will ever keep one occupied with make-work.

THE HOME AND THE FAMILY BUSINESS

The first issue of the father away from his family has to do with the way a family makes a living. Let's start in the garden of Eden. God made man. He placed him in the garden of Eden. God also gave Adam a job related to the garden that He had put him in: "*to dress it and to keep it*" (Genesis 2:15). Therefore, Adam's home was also his workplace.

Then God gave Adam a help meet. She was to help him with whatever he was doing, like his work in the garden. So, God created Adam and Eve, placed them in a home, which was also their workplace as well as their home – thus, God set up the first "family business."

Now, if a man leaves his wife and spends all day "at work," how can she be fulfilling her God-given role of "help" meet? Moreover how would the husband fulfill his role of "cleaving" to his wife (Genesis 2:24) when he is "leaving" his wife all day? When a husband "leaves" his home and "goes to work" where many times *another man's wife* becomes his "helper" all day, is this proper? Is it the design of God for *another man's wife* to be his "help" meet? In many homes the husband is off being "helped" all day by another man's wife, while his wife is off "helping" another man! Is this divine design? Or is this human confusion? Are not men designed by God to love, and have sexual feelings and passions for their female "helper?" Isn't that *only natural* by the design of God? Maybe it is not the *feelings* that are unnatural, but the *circumstances*! It's a wonder there is not *more* adultery and divorce!

THE PROVISION OF FAMILY

Adam was given a job, and Eve was his *God-ordained* helper. The further design of God was for the children to be trained up as "servants" (Galatians 4:1). Who would they be "serving?" Their parents and family! So, they would be working, by divine design, in the "family business." In fact, the provision of the family is seen in Scripture to be a family affair. This provision encompasses the extended family, and it is this extended family that constitutes a "household." We know this from Paul's instruction concerning widows. Grandchildren (translated "nephews") are clearly a part of the "household" and responsible for the care of their aunts (I Timothy 5:3-4).

Allow us to speak more freely, on a personal level. Here is how I have taught this to my own children. I have taught them that when they are grown with spouses and children, they all will still have a collective responsibility to each other's homes. Example: my daughter gets married and her husband becomes sick and unable to provide. We would have four other family units (me and my three sons, and their wives) to pick up any slack that may be caused as a result, and to do so as long as needed. By sharing the load (1/4 each) we should have no undue "burden." That's a part of what families are for. To do less is to "deny the faith" and be "worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5:8).

In fact, I have talked with my children about how this same principle could apply to the "honeymoon." In God's law to Israel, he made a provision that a husband cheer up his new wife for a year without business and government distractions (Deuteronomy 24:5). Now, granted

this is the law of Moses, and we are no longer under the law – we are Christ’s free men – but let us pause to consider: exactly what was God’s intent in the provision of this law to Israel? Was it not that the husband and new wife would have sufficient *time* together to “cleave?” What a great foundation to a new home a year would make! Now, I am not proposing that we re-institute the law on this matter, but rather that we recognize the important principle that underlies this law. How important it is that the husband make his new wife the absolute focus of his attention as the foundation of their beginning relationship!

A return to basic principles of family life is how this even could have been possible – by the family business and extended family life! I have told my children that it is not in the realm of the impossible for us to provide this for each of them as they marry – all the rest of us pitching in to help cover them for a good start. Then each of them, as they got married, could be free – if but for a little while – to focus on nothing else but cheering up their new wife (or being cheered up, in the case of my daughter)!

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Now let’s go back to the education of the children. What were Adam and Eve to do when they had children? They had no classrooms to which to send them. Education is, by the design of creation, a parental responsibility. We again can see this principle stressed under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 6:7), and Paul instructs the fathers, regarding their children, to “*bring them up*” in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Paul did not say “send them off” in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, or “farm them out” in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, or “field them out;” he said to “*bring them up.*” This would seem to be rather difficult to do if they are only together for a small amount of time before bed.

THE WESTERN CLASSROOM

It seems to me that the *western classroom* is not a natural learning environment for children (or maybe even adults!) either. Where did we learn this method? How did we come to embrace it as the standard? I believe that the most natural learning environment would be the home and the family business themselves – children learning from life with their parents – and they are learning that which is practical and applicable to everyday life and making a living.

I have *NO* desire for any of my children to go to college and have “careers.” I do not aspire for any of them to be “professionals” – but I do greatly desire that all of them be family oriented: to have family businesses and enjoy daily life *together* with their spouses and children! I don’t want them to be required to “leave home” to make a living *for* their family. I want them to make a living *WITH* their family.

I am not attempting to paint a rosy picture of this style of family life. In fact, in many aspects it may be the harder road. There could be many more pressures and difficulties, especially in the area of finances. These things may require a different level of lifestyle to be adopted. It may mean on occasion (or even as a rule) that beans and rice become the staple of life instead of steak. Still, if that is what is needed to stay together as a family, then it seems like a very small

price to pay! A common American approach is for parents to want their children to have the best of *things* – to shower them with *things*, to provide for them the *things* that they themselves did not have growing up. I contend that this may not be the best course of action. I would rather give my children more of me – more of my time, my attention, and my love – with or without *things*. This is true of our wives as well. Flowers, candy, dinner and a movie may be nice, but again, they are no substitute for our time, attention, and love. Our wives and children need us to give them our *lives*! If need be, I would rather eat the simplest of foods, and live the most modest lifestyle in order to enjoy the rich benefits of daily life with my family.

I am *not* suggesting that anyone who adopts the *normal* western family life has chosen a sinful course, or that they are less spiritual. *Neither* am I advocating that men and women quit their jobs, pull their children out of school, throw out all their TVs and computers and stop going to “church.” Such an abrupt action may cause more damage than it would ever attempt to correct. What I *am* advocating is for us to pause and consider. What I am suggesting is that there is possibly another way to live – one that is deliberate and thought out. I am proposing that we ask ourselves, “In light of the Scripture, is the American family lifestyle really the way we want to live? Is this the way I want my children to grow up and live?”

There is a sense in which we must deal with the hand we are dealt, so to speak. We must learn to deal with the circumstances that are currently before us. BUT, if we see this overall problem, we should not just give in to the course of this world’s system. We can start thinking differently and slowly begin working on change. This change may not be fully realized in our own personal lives, but much of it may be, and as we share these truths and principles with our children and grandchildren we may be able to free them from the bondage that has our minds and activities in such disorder, and may thus greatly impact the next generation of our own families.

Our family has had a great advantage over the majority of others in our culture. We have spent the majority of our days *together*; but so much more needs to be accomplished. There were so many things that I did not understand early on. I trust that my children and grandchildren will reap from the present purpose and passion of my heart.

A WORD ABOUT ADULTCHILDREN AND GRACE

Since I have intended this to be personal in nature, I would like to touch briefly on my own attitude about these things in relation to my children. Over the years I have attempted to teach these things to my children. I have also attempted to model them as best I could in light of my own circumstances. I have done so because I have a firm conviction and passion about them. I trust that they have sensed how important these matters are to me. I have sought to instill the same principles in them.

As my children began to reach adulthood, I tried to communicate to them that I did not require them to share my convictions on these issues (or any other ones for that matter!), nor did I require them to follow my lifestyle. I did not desire that they believe what I believe, or practice what I practice, but rather just to please me. I wanted them to follow the Lord out of a pure heart of personal faith. I wanted their faith and walk to be their own before God. I could desire nothing

more or less of my children.

If their studies and convictions would lead them elsewhere (even if it is in an opposite direction from me!), I told them that I would support and encourage them in those things. All I desired to see in them is a genuine heart to honor the Lord with what they understand – and I'll be there to stand behind them as best I can even if it is contrary to my own convictions and practices. This is because there are greater principles that have preeminence in my own heart – the principles of pure grace, unconditional love, genuine acceptance, individual faith and personal liberty. Paul taught that two men with opposite beliefs and practices (even if one may be weak in the faith) could both live their lives in honor unto the Lord.

Now, this does not mean that I could always walk with them in all things, but it does mean that I can support and encourage them to be faithful unto the Lord based on the understanding of their own hearts (Romans 14).

Dear husbands and fathers, I write this for us, as simply from one head to another. This has been meant to be an encouragement to us, not a discouragement. I trust that we will give these issues thoughtful and prayerful consideration in light of God's Word. I trust that they will help to impassion us to an active role as heads, unlike the passive role that is so prevalent in our culture. I would appreciate any light or insight that you may be able and willing to share with me – one head to another! We are fellows together with such an important responsibility before the Lord. Let us encourage and help one another.

Taken from the *Bible Student's Notebook*[™], a weekly Bible study publication available in two formats (electronic and printed).

www.BibleStudentsNotebook.com

Study Shelf, PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963
1-800-784-6010 / www.StudyShelf.com

B I B L E S T U D E N T ' S P R E S S [™]
W i n d b e r , P e n n s y l v a n i a

