



Marriage & Family Life

Discuss – What would you say makes and defines a family?
What pressures do you think there are on families today?
How good do you think the church is at really supporting families?

It is fair to say that modern families are under tremendous pressures. Long working hours, shift work, isolation of families because of the breakdown of community. The pressures of the consumer society which get people into debt and then the pressure of poverty. All these factors have put marriage and family life under pressure like never before.

So what does the bible say about marriage and family life?

The idea contained within the Old Testament is one which put the individual family into the context of a corporate family. Family life was seen very much from the perspective of the wider community. This was expressed like this:-

Individual families – supported and helped build the strength of the nation. They would do this by having children, contributing to the community economically and politically. Families were responsible to bring up the children to be good citizens and pass onto them a knowledge of God. This was done through teaching and disciplining their children. Children were called to honour their parents and make their own choice when old enough to choose on whether to follow God or not.

In the same way the wider nation supported family life and so there was a real sense of community care for families in a very extended way.

Read – Deuteronomy Ch 6 v 1 – 6, Deut. Ch 5 v 16

For Israel the health of the nation was dependent on the health of the family unit. As families created Godly families, God's glory would be reflected in the nation.

Discuss – What do you think happens if the family life of a nation breaks down?
How do you think the break up of the wider extended family / and community has deepened the problems?
How do you think the community of the church can help in these situations?

In Traditional the church has taught clear role relationships within family life:-

- Husband / Father - The idea of headmanship. One who lovingly protects and provides for his family. Does not lord it over his family and misuse his authority, but has a natural leadership role within his family environment.
- Wife/ Mother - The idea of a nurturer. One who teaches, cares for and prepares her children for the wider world. Works in partnership with husband but recognises his headship.
- Children - Called to respect and obey their parents. To participate in giving to the family and helping with family tasks.

Although there is much teaching on the headmanship of the husband this has to be balanced with the call that is laid out with the New Testament for all family members to be submissive and respectful to each other. In Ephesians Ch 5 a well known passage used to reinforce male authority, Paul starts off by saying in verse 21 “Yield to obey each other because you respect Christ.” Here we get a real sense of a mutually submissive relationship where there is a sense of mutual love, respect and care expressed in all family relationships. The headship of the husband is not about exerting authority over his wife but is about helping his wife to be fully herself in a relationship of mutuality.

Read – Ephesians Ch 5 v 21 – Ch 6 v 4 What do we learn from this passage?

Scripture teaches us some clear truths :-

Work should not become more important than family life or undermine it.

Families should help and provide not only for the immediate family but also for the extended one. In fact failure to care for your relatives was failure to honour God.

Family health is paramount to a Nation's health. If family is undermined then the door is open for massive social problems and the possibility of a breakdown in society.

Discuss – what do you think within relationship causes family stress and disunity?
How do you think we can change those things within us that create these problems?