

Family

Webster defines “family” as “a group of people who are related to each other. This sense of family can refer to a group that consists of parents and their children or it can refer to a bigger group of related people including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.” Another source defined “family” as “a social unit consisting of parents and the children they raise.” Still a different source defined families (plural) as “the divine building blocks of society.”

Various definitions have been given of “family,” but the fact remains that families are very, very important. George Bernard Shaw is quoted as saying “a happy family is but an earlier heaven.” Arthur Brandt said “other things may change us, but we start and end with the family.” Another source said “being a family means you are a part of something very wonderful. It means you will love and be loved for the rest of your life.”

Yes, many uninspired people have given voice to the importance of families. However, the value of families and family life was recognized by God from the very beginning! It was God Who said “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him,*” Gen. 2:18. It was God Who then “*caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam,*” at which time “*He took one of his ribs,*” which He “*made into a woman, and...and brought her unto the man,*” at which time Adam said “*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man,*” Gen. 2:21-23. And it was God Who then said, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*” Commenting on these verses, Jesus said “*they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate,*” Matt. 19:4-6. Moreover, the writer of Hebrews said that “*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge,*” Heb. 13:4.

God not only originated marriage and the family relationship; He also divinely regulated it. He clearly forbade adultery, Ex. 20:14, and stressed that children must “*honor*” their “*father and mother,*” Ex. 20:12, and “*obey*” their “*parents in the Lord,*” Eph. 6:1-2. Fathers are commanded to bring their children “*up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,*” Eph. 6:4. Husbands must love their wives as “*Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her,*” Eph. 5:25. A husband must dwell with his wife “*with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life,*” I Peter 3:7. Wives must “*submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord,*” Eph. 5:22, and the wife must “*see that she respects her husband,*” Eph. 5:33. And the time may very well come when the roles are switched, with the children (in essence) necessarily becoming the parents and showing “*piety at home and to repay their parents,*” a thing which is “*good and acceptable before God,*” I Tim. 5:4.

There is no way to over value the importance of a good family — a family wherein parents honor their God-given obligations to each other and to the children, where love for God and each other reigns supreme, and where children honor their parents, and in which all parties have resolved within themselves saying, “*as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,*” Josh. 24:15.

Marriage and family constitutes the oldest institution on earth. God formed the family structure at the very beginning. As God conceived it, and as the Bible directs it, it is a sacred institution and must be preserved at all costs. And, when God’s precepts regarding families are properly honored, the consequential this-world blessings are beyond our ability to either describe or fully comprehend. And this becomes especially evident when death knocks at the door and

takes away a cherished family member! But, regardless of the occasion, the storms of life are much easier to bear when the family is strong and caring, and when all seek “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*” Matt. 6:33. That which really makes a nation strong is not a two-party political system, nor highly accredited colleges and universities; rather it is strong families, consisting of God-fearing husbands, wives, children, parents and grandparents, and all family members honoring their obligations to God and each other!

The Spiritual Family!

Our concept of “family” must not be confined to the domestic family. All Christians are God’s “*children*” and, as such, they are “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,*” Rom. 8:17! All Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, are “*fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*” Eph. 2:19. The church Jesus built, Matt. 16:18, and purchased with His blood, Acts 20:28, is divinely described as “*the house of God,*” I Tim. 3:15, an expression denoting the **family** of God.

When people scripturally obey the gospel God adds them to His church, Acts 2:47. However, “*church*” is primarily used in two senses — referring to the **universal** church and the **local** church. The church in the universal sense consists of all “*saved*” people, Acts 2:47, all whose names are “*in the Book of Life,*” Phil. 4:3, all who are “*registered in heaven,*” Heb. 12:23.

But God did not intend for His children to be “members at large.” He made provision for the local church, as is evidenced by references to “*the church of God..at Corinth,*” I Cor. 1:2, “*the churches of Judea,*” Gal. 1:22; “*the church of the Thessalonians,*” I Thess. 1:1, “*the seven churches of Asia...in Asia,*” Rev. 1:4, etc., etc. Each local church, when fully organized according to God’s plan, consists of “*saints in Christ Jesus...with the bishops (elders) and deacons,*” Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23. Bishops, or elders, must shepherd, oversee, and feed “*the flock of God*” of which they are a part, Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2, ever being mindful that they must “*watch out*” for souls, and that some day they must “*give account,*” Heb. 13:17. And the members must “*be submissive*” to the elders until, or unless, the elders request them to do that which is unscriptural — at which time they must say “*we ought to obey God rather than men,*” Acts 5:29.

Membership in a sound, local church provides innumerable blessings! It means that, generally speaking, there are elders who “*watch out*” for your soul. It means being a part of a local “**church family**” whose members care deeply and dearly for one another. It means there are those who are concerned about my physical well being. Cf. Acts 4:32-34; 6:1-7; I Tim. 5:16. It means there are those who are ready to “*restore*” me when I am “*overtaken*” in a trespass, Gal. 6:1. It means there are those who are ready to help me “*bear*” my “*burdens,*” Gal. 6:2. It means there are those ready to “*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,*” and will seek to discourage me from “*forsaking*” *the assemblies of the saints,*” Heb. 10:24-25. It means there are those who dearly “*love*” me, Col. 2:2, and are ready to “*pray for*” me, Jas. 5:16.

Of course, all blessings, whether physical, domestic, or spiritual, are accompanied with attendant responsibilities. And no sober-minded person should ignore those responsibilities. But think of how fortunate faithful Christians are when they are members of a sound local “**church family,**” whose members love them and are concerned about both their this-world and next-world well-being! By faith, which comes by hearing God’s word, Rom. 10:17, I know the aforementioned statement is correct. But by observation, I have seen it demonstrated time and again. Over the years I have seen it repeatedly evidenced at Seffner whose members love both God and one another. In recent months I have seen it demonstrated during the critical illness of our recently deceased daughter, who for many years was a faithful member of the Lakeshore

church of Christ in Jacksonville, FL. For many months (and even years) the members thereof in so many ways demonstrated their love and concern for both our daughter and her family. Of course, this is the way it ought to be, but it served as a vivid illustration of how blessed one is if he (or she) is a part of a sound local church family. Yes, “**family**” (whether domestic or spiritual) provides so many blessings of indescribable value — especially when all family members function according to the Scriptures.

**** —Bobby Witherington