

"Successful Family Living"

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

- INTRO. - No one needs to tell us that the family is in serious trouble today. In fact, it is highly likely that our generation has seen the end of the traditional family. Marriages are in trouble. Less than half of all children are growing up in a family with two parents in their first marriage. And (in fact) only 64% of children today are growing up in families where there are two parents present.

- Oftentimes, children are growing up in homes where there is great conflict and instability. In many cases parents don't know what to do with their rebellious children. The child-centered family has become the norm (to the detriment of, *not only* the entire family structure, but to those children who "rule the roost.")

- And (of course) many factors have contributed to the demise of the traditional family: the influence of liberal political views, the influence of liberal theology, a lack of biblical teaching, the influence of the media, and many others.

- At the family level, there is poor communication, uncontrolled anger, verbal abuse, selfishness, demanding one's own way, a lack of love, a lack of discipline, and many others.

- This has led to a number of sinful patterns and social problems, such as immorality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, domestic abuse, juvenile crime, women's liberation, and many other similar outcomes.

- And all of those things have served as cords forming a rope that has strangled the family. The family as God designed it to be has become very rare in these days. Families are truly struggling!

- And since so much of our meaning and purpose comes from this most intimate of relationships, it is understandable why so many are struggling with finding meaning and purpose in life. When the family cracks and crumbles, so does the sense of meaning and security in life. We are desperately in need of the principles of God's Word applied to our families.

- And even though some of us now are in the stage of life where our children are grown and out of the house, we can still apply these important principles to our marriages and our grand-children, as well as helping our children even though they are adults.

- You know, sometimes I think all of us would like to put our families in some kind of protective bubble so that nothing could ever harm them. I know that most parents feel that way about their children.

- As you send your children out to school and out into the world, don't you wish that you could put them into a

protective bubble so that they would never be exposed to anything that would harm them in any way or undermine the values that you are trying to teach them?

- But we all know that it doesn't work that way. We can protect them from *some* negative influences by the standards we set in our homes and by the choices we make, but we can't protect them from *everything*.

- So this morning, I want to show you something that can have even a more powerful impact in your family than a protective bubble. We are beginning a new series today on the family, and I want us to start in the OT, in Deut. 6. (Turn with me in your Bible to Deut. 6.)

- Here in Deut. 6:1-9, Moses gave the people of Israel this powerful tool as they went from the wilderness into the Promised Land. Paraphrasing what he said, you could put it this way, "These are the things God wants you to get into your life so that when you go into the Promised Land, you will be able to survive."

- In other words, Moses was telling them how to live successfully in a land where he knew there would be much opposition, and God knew that the key to their survival was dependent upon their having strong families.

- God knew that their greatest danger was *not* a battle *against* the world; their greatest danger was their becoming *like* the world. That has never changed! That is still the greatest danger to the family.

- And what Moses told the Israelites for having successful families is still very relevant for today. We read it a few moments ago, but let's go through it in more detail.

- We have a very simple outline this morning. We're going to see 1. The Law of the Lord 2. The Love of the Lord and 3. Learning the Law and Love of the Lord. Notice, first of all:

I. THE LAW OF THE LORD (vs. 1-3)

- The Law of the Lord is a powerful force. It is greater than a protective bubble for your family. Moses began by saying, "Fear the Lord your God..." (v. 2) Of course, when he said that, he did *not* mean that they were to live in dread of God or to be afraid of Him in the way most people today think of fear. God is *not* just sitting around waiting for us to mess up so He can squash us like a bug...

- The word for "fear" (there) means reverence and awe. It means that we are to have great respect for God and His commandments. These commandments are *absolutes* of God and are very important to family living. Moses said that if the people did *not* highly respect the laws of God, that they would go into the promised land and fail miserably with enormous consequences.

- It is still the same today! Our families will disintegrate today if we do *not* follow God's design. And (listen) it does *not* matter if our world has given up on absolutes, if we do *not* highly respect the commandments of God, we will pay a great price in our families.

- ILL. - One pastor wrote this: "One of my first experiences of disregarding absolutes was in a science project at school. I was in elementary school, and I was supposed to demonstrate some kind of scientific principle to the whole class.

My dad taught me how to make a magnet out of a bolt by the use of electricity. I thought it was really cool, so I couldn't wait to get to school that day and impress all the other boys, in fact, I was hoping it might even impress a couple of girls in my class.

I went to class, put all my project supplies out on the table and began my demonstration. Everyone in the class was watching carefully. I wrapped a wire around the bolt and attached it to the positive end of one battery.

Then I attached the other end to the positive post of another battery. I tried to pick up a piece of metal and nothing happened. It didn't work. I kept trying and trying to get it to work, but it wouldn't. Finally I said, 'Well, I guess the batteries must not be any good...' and I sat back down in embarrassment. I put all my stuff back in a bag and went home that day in humiliation.

When I got home, I told my dad what happened and he explained to me what I had done wrong. I should have put one wire on the positive end and one on the negative end."

- Then the pastor said, "That science project taught me an important lesson about absolutes. An absolute law of science was involved, and if I didn't heed that law, things would *not* work properly. I learned that day that you cannot disregard absolutes without ill effects."

- And this is just as true with the absolutes of God's Word. You can choose to disregard them if you want to, but when you do, you will pay the price for disregarding His truth.

- Folks, I hope you understand – it does *not* matter what anyone in this world says – God has designed the family, and He has given us some absolute principles in regard to it – and if we disregard those principles, we will suffer as a result. Our families (and our lives) will *not* be blessed as God intended.

- Now, why do people often disregard God's absolutes in our world today? You know, there are some things that are always right and some things that are always wrong, and yet most people in our society today do *not* believe that. Why is that?

- Here is why I believe God's absolutes are being ignored today. Turn with me in your Bible to Eccl. 8:11. Eccl.

8:11 says, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil."

- That verse is simply saying that because of delayed consequences, we think that we are getting by with it. God does *not* always bring the consequences of our wrongdoing about immediately – so *many* people conclude that they will *never* come.

- We think that we can pick and choose – and do what we want – and that there will be no consequences of our actions, but God assures us that the consequences *will* come *eventually*. The absolutes of God do *not* change – and they always carry consequences.

- We may *not* see the adverse consequences of our choices *immediately*, but they *will* come in due time. You can't disregard God's principles for your family without eventually paying the price!

- Prov. 1:7 says, "The fear of the LORD (the awe and respect of the absolutes of God) is the beginning of knowledge (or wisdom)..." Only the fool disregards the Lord's instruction (to his own peril).

- But (going back to Deut. 6) there is another phrase I want you to notice in Deut. 6:2. He says, "...keep all His statutes and His commandments..." Notice that we are *not* just supposed to *know* His commandments, we are

supposed to *keep* them. Verse 1 says, "...that you might do them..." Verse 3 says, "...and be careful to do it..."

- The emphasis *here* is that it is *not* enough to simply *know* what is right; you have to *do* what is right. *Not only* must we *know* the absolutes of God, we must *live* according to them.

- This is the very same thing that Joshua told the Lord's people in Joshua 1:8. He said, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

- ILL. - I have had people come into my office for counseling, and they know the Bible. They can quote Bible passages, but their marriages are in a mess, their homes are falling apart. What is the problem? The problem is that they are *not* doing what they know.

- Listen, it does *not* matter how much of the Bible we know if we are *not* putting it into practice in our daily lives. (pause) I am firmly convinced that God wants the very best for each and every one of us. He *wants* us to be successful; especially in our families. But it is all dependent upon *living* according to the absolutes He has given us in His Word.

- Now, there is one last phrase in this first section that I want you to notice. Look at the last phrase of verse 2, "...that your days may be prolonged." This is a way of saying that if we are careful to heed His absolutes, we will live a long and prosperous life.

- That doesn't *necessarily* mean *materially* prosperous, but is talking about the over-all quality of life. It is another way of saying that we will be fulfilled and successful. God is really giving us here a law of success. Do you want to be successful in your family living? Then do it God's way!

- You know, some people get the idea that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, that God's *love* then became so predominant that it did away with His *law*. But Jesus said that He did *not* come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

- Yes, the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law have been abrogated (as we have seen in our study of Hebrews), but the moral law of God is absolute and unchanging. The moral law of God is based on His own nature and character.

- *God* does *not* change, and neither do His *principles*. What God intended for the family at the beginning of creation, He still intends for the family today. It doesn't matter that the times have changed and the culture has changed; His moral laws have *not* changed.

- In fact, the truth of the matter is, you cannot separate the *law* of God from the *love* of God. The two go hand in hand. Jesus said in John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."

- In other words, it is the keeping of the moral law of God that shows we truly love Christ. Obeying the moral law of God gives evidence of our love – *not* just singing songs about loving Him or telling people how much we love Him – we are proving it by our actions. (Pause) So we see the importance of the law of the Lord. Secondly we see:

II. THE LOVE OF THE LORD (vs. 4-6)

- Vs. 4-6 talk about the love of the Lord. This is the second thing that is more powerful than a protective bubble. But now, before I say much about the love of God, I want to make sure we clearly understand the definition of the word love.

- There are so many different definitions of the word "love" in our day and time that it is easy to get confused. I think (biblically) you can boil the word "love" down to the aspect of giving. Love is synonymous with giving.

- "God so loved the world that He (what?) *gave* His only begotten Son..." And what did the Son do? He gave His

life for us, to die in our place. That's what this idea of love (here) is all about. It is the giving of yourself.

- Moses describes the love we are to have for God in v. 5, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

- This means that we are to give to the Lord all that we are – and this attitude is also to be reflected toward our families. If we are *not* careful, we will end up giving to everyone else and have nothing left to give to our families. I know *many* in the ministry that have done exactly that. They are always out “ministering” to other people while their own family is *not* being cared for.

- But I believe, that the love we have for the Lord should spill over into the same kind of love for our families. Notice what happens when we have this kind of love toward God. V. 6 says, "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart..."

- The way that God's absolutes become a part of your nature and lifestyle, is by loving God enough to highly respect and meditate upon His commandments continually. God's Word should be continually on our hearts. That is a large part of our love for God; that we are meditating on His Word.

- If you truly love God, (and are grateful for His free gift of eternal life through Christ), then His commands are *not* burdensome. They are *not* drudgery; and they become

second nature to us. We will *want* to obey, and we will *know* His truths, because they are constantly on our hearts.

- You know, one of the most important decisions that you and I make every day is what we are going to allow to be on our hearts. What do we fill our minds with? What are we pre-occupied with? What do we spend our time doing? Do we have God's priorities as we go through our day?

- This is why it is so important that we spend time every day with the Lord. That's why it's so important that we are taking every opportunity to immerse ourselves in God's Word. We need to get the things of the Lord on our hearts.

- You see, we often don't have time (when things come up), to stop and reflect and say, "Gee, I wonder what God's absolutes are on this." Life moves too fast for that. His truth has to become a part of our hearts; and an integral part of our thought process every day. We react to things in our lives by what is in our hearts. So we must make sure that God's Word is getting there.

- ILL. - One pastor wrote that he was going to visit a family in his church and when he got there, he saw the father and his son out in the backyard.

As he was going around the side of the house, he overheard that daddy cursing and yelling at the boy for

something he had done or failed to do. But as soon as he saw the pastor he started patting the boy on the head and talking kindly to him.

The pastor said, "I wanted to say, too late! You've been caught!" You see, how we behave is based on what is in our hearts. And it is especially true when it comes to how we treat our families. In the context of the home, what is in the heart inevitably comes out.

- But having the things of God on our hearts will greatly effect the way we love God and the way we love our families. And notice the last thing we see in this passage of Scripture.

III. LEARNING THE LAW AND THE LOVE OF THE LORD (vs. 7-9)

- God's law and His love must become a part of the life of our families – and parents have a sobering, God-given responsibility to instruct their children in His Word. It's not just pastors who bear the weight of training in sound doctrine – parents also have that responsibility.

- The Lord has commanded, "...you shall teach them [the principles of God's law] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." (v. 7)

- The Hebrew word for "teach them diligently" means to "sharpen" or "to pierce the conscience and challenge the loyalty." In other words, Moses was saying that they were to form the thinking patterns of their children upon the principles of God's Word.

- Really, this is talking about teaching sound doctrine. And the truth of the matter is, the teaching of sound doctrine is becoming weaker and weaker with every passing generation.

- Because Christians are *not* being taught sound doctrine today, *many* are wholeheartedly embracing error, and there is very little biblical discernment. As a result, a lot of so-called Christians (now) find popular philosophies to be more satisfying than biblical truth.

- Tim Challies has said, "We have attempted to make Christianity palatable by making it simplistic." We now have "gospel light" and surface devotional thoughts as the bulk of the diet in the church.

- Challies has stated that there are a number of reasons why doctrinal ignorance now pervades the church. He says, "For decades, Christians have focused on felt needs rather than doctrinal truth. We have focused on immediately-applicable topical sermons rather than verse-by-verse exposition that unleashes the whole truth of God's whole Word. We have ceased catechizing our children, building within them a solid, systematic foundation for their faith. We have emphasized

Christianity as a relationship with God at the expense of Christianity as an established body of truth.”

- All this has taken a toll on the church, but the point (here) is that it all starts in the family. We must be teaching sound doctrine, *not only* in the church, but also in the home.

- Of course, Christianity is *more* than sound doctrine, but it can't be *less*. Our relationship with God must be built on the solid foundation of biblical truth. Every believer must be grounded in God's Word and able to discern truth from error. And that all starts in your family.

- Now, there are groups of people today that say we should *not* try to form our children's thinking; that we should just allow our children to think for themselves and make their own choices, etc.

- In fact, there are *many* today who say that we (as parents) have no right to tell our children what is right and what is wrong, but rather (they say) we should expose them to all kinds of things and let them make up their own minds.

- I've heard parents say, "Well, I am just going to let my child make up his own mind...I don't want to shove anything down his throat - including (and perhaps especially) religion.”

- Folks, according to the authority of God's Word, that is absolute *hogwash!* God says, "Teach them diligently, every day, when you're sitting around the house, when you're out walking around, when you get up in the morning and when you go to bed at night...be constantly pouring God's Word into their lives!"

- You're *not* poking it down their *throats*; you're pouring it into the *hearts!* Make no mistake – we are to do this when it comes to the things of God; His absolutes. We don't need to be apologetic about it; it is something God says that we are to do.

- You know, when you think about this philosophy of just letting our kids decide and make up their own minds, we don't do that in most other things, but for some reason, we think we should when it comes to spiritual things.

- ILL. - If you're child wakes up and says, "I don't want to go to school today," we don't say, "well, that's fine honey, you just make up your own mind." And yet, *many* do exactly that when it comes to going to church and learning the things of God!

- We shouldn't give our children a choice about going to Sunday School and church. We shouldn't give them a choice about being in the youth group. We should say to them, as long as you are under our roof, we (as a family) are going to honor and worship the Lord every Lord's Day.

- And we should teach them that God has absolutes that we *must* live by. If your child comes home and says, "I don't want 2+2 to equal 4; I want it to equal 5," we don't say, "Whatever you think; it's your choice..." That's nonsense! (At least it is nonsense to anyone who is rational and has any common sense left...) And it is just as much nonsense to do that in the spiritual arena!

- These are God's absolutes. We are to be teaching them to our children constantly. I promise you – it *does* make a difference! Now, you say, "How can I teach the absolutes of God to my family?"

- He tells us here. He says, "...and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

- The two key words in this verse are *talk* and *walk*. That phrase "...talk of them when you sit in your house..." is a reference to those informal times when you are relaxing at home. This is talking about family time together. I hope you still have that. I hope you still have meals together and have times when you are being together as a family.

- But in order to follow this admonition, it requires that we turn some things off and tune some things in. It means you have to turn off all the devices, and tune in to teaching your children. Don't just "veg out" staring at the

TV; take those opportunities to be teaching your family about the things of God.

- That doesn't necessarily mean having formal family devotions, (although that is a great thing to do). But you can be looking for those teachable moments at home to insert one of God's principles and talk about how it applies to a particular situation.

- The phrase "...when you walk by the way..." is a reference to your lifestyle. You teach as much (or more) by your actions as by your words. So what this is saying is, "Be an example before your children by loving God and loving His Word." In other words, *walk your talk!!!*

- You know, I believe that one of the main reason teenagers rebel is when they observe hypocrisy in their parents! It's *not* enough to talk the talk. It's *not* enough to be able to constantly spout Scripture. It's *not* enough to have all your theological I's dotted and T's crossed.

- If your family does *not* see that there is a genuine love for God and an honest desire to obey His commands, then your *actions* will outweigh what you *say* you believe, and you will lay the groundwork for rebellion.

- If your children do *not* see you exhibit a high priority for the church (the bride of Christ) then they will know that it doesn't really mean that much to you – and as soon as they are old enough they will forsake the Lord's

church. This is one reason why we have young people leaving the church in droves.

- But notice that phrase, "when you lie down." Bedtime is a great time to teach children about God. You can read Bible stories to them or teach them to pray. You may be able to talk to them about something that is on their minds and teach a spiritual principle to them in that setting.

- Then it says, "...and when you rise up." This is a great opportunity to teach your children to get into God's Word first thing in the morning. What an important discipline it is, to learn from the very earliest of age, that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path that will lead us to a life of abundance and blessing.

- Well, look at vs. 8-9 with me, "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

- Now, before you start thinking that this means to put Scripture memory cards all over the house, or taping them on your forehead – understand that this was to be taken symbolically. This is a figure of speech.

- As I'm sure you know, the Pharisees of Jesus' day took this literally, and started wearing these large boxes (called phylacteries) literally on their heads or on their wrists. But that was *not* the intent. This is *not* talking

about wearing a portion of the Bible around like a piece of jewelry.

- It simply means that God's Word is to be woven throughout the fabric of your life. This is *not* about *decor*; it is about spiritual *discipline*. Moses was saying that teaching our families the things of God is to be a continual lifestyle. It's *not* just a Sunday morning thing...

- Why? So that you can be successful in God's eyes and enjoy the kind of successful family living that God intended for the family. You can't put your family in a protective bubble, but you *can* do something even more powerful than that; you can give them a love for God's absolutes and you can give them a love for God that will carry them through anything they may encounter in this life.

- And we're going to be going through various aspects of the family over the next few weeks. We're going to devote this entire summer to the examination of biblical principles for the family. I hope you will commit to being a part of this entire series, and that you will invite someone else who needs to hear what God's Word has to say about the family.

- PRAYER