

“Doctrines to be Rejected” No. 35 of the *Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith* states that we should not “serve in the army, or as police constables, take part in politics, *or recover debts by legal coercion*”. This encapsulates the principle of our separation from the world because we live by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21).

We should not therefore resort to litigation,¹ which is a symptom of the spirit that is at work in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2).

Appealing to Caesar

When Paul appealed to Caesar, it was not to obtain compensation for wrongful imprisonment, nor indeed for any personal benefit (Acts 25:11,12). Having been told by the Lord that he must bear witness in Rome (23:11), the apostle

was showing that he had been commanded by God to preach Christ to all nations (26:20), but in so doing he had not offended against Jewish law, nor indeed against Roman law. His appeal to Rome was occasioned by the circumstances of Festus seeking to do the Jews a pleasure in sending Paul back to Jerusalem (25:9), and to certain death thereby.

The principle here for us is that if we are taken to court, not in the matter of a personal legal action, but for the Truth’s sake, then an ‘appeal to Caesar’ may be appropriate. The example of conscientious objection to military service comes to mind, with such a stand being another opportunity to witness for Christ.

1. There are times when there is nothing wrong in employing a solicitor, for example, in a property transaction. Both Abraham (Gen. 23) and Jeremiah (Jer. 32:6-12) followed the legal custom of the time in purchasing property. Such legal processes are not litigation seeking compensation or redress.

“The household of God” (Eph. 2:19)

Godly relationships in our home life

Harry Tennant

How do we build a godly household in this confused and largely unbelieving world? This article sets signposts and guidelines to help us find our way for our particular household even in adverse circumstances. How soon do we teach our children the good way? What about single parent homes? What are the right roles for husband and wife? God does set us seemingly impossible tasks, but there are true ideals.

WE ARE AMONGST the most privileged people on earth. God is our guide, and He has provided for us an infallible handbook. Take, for instance, our responsibilities to our household. We are given a remarkable role model, which includes detailed instructions. Listen to these words. They are as if we are overhearing the soliloquy of the angel of God: “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely

become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:17-19).

If Abraham properly carried out these instructions they would serve to bring about the fulfilment of the great and precious promises of God.

Those promises included the salvation of responsive Gentiles—they included us. Indeed, by our faith and walk in the way of the Lord, we demonstrate that we are part of the extended household of Abraham.

Abraham's immediate family, Sarah and Isaac, were the fruits of his faithful application of God's word. Thereby Sarah by faith conceived Isaac, and Isaac was faithful unto 'death' on mount Moriah.

Abraham's household numbered many hundreds of menservants and maidservants. All of these were instructed by Abraham their lord. The instruction was diligently and fully administered, as we see in Genesis 24, where the nameless servant fulfils his mission in the name of Abraham's God and in the spirit of the covenant words, mercy and truth. A wife for Isaac was found by the faith of the dedicated servant who served his master away from home as though he were at home.

The instructions Abraham received from the most High God and his unquestioning response in faithful service are surely meant for us to follow. More than that, they will bring blessings.

Relationships

Wherever there are people there are relationships of one kind and another. The letter to the Ephesians deals with, and teaches how to handle, relationships, whether these are intimate or less so. There are basic principles by which we should work. For example, God is over all, and in Him we live and move and have our being. He is the provider for His creation, and He furnishes us with boundless evidence of His magnanimity. The fruit of the field, the flowers of the gardens and hedgerows, the beauty of heaven and earth and the consistency of tides and seasons are patterns for us to use in our lesser lives.

Moreover, He is a Father. All mankind are His offspring, for without Him we would have no being (Acts 17:25,28). And there is an even higher Fatherhood, by which we are begotten in Christ by the power of His Word (1 Pet. 1:23).

There is also the whole purpose of God: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and ground

ded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:14-19).

As we shall see, these Divine relationships are intended to be the fountain of all our relationships, secular, family and ecclesial.

Matrimony

Not every one gets married, and the reasons are varied. These days some people put careers before marriage and are 'married' to their jobs. It is a personal matter, of course, but, as in many other things, a disciple needs to examine his or her mind-set to ensure that it does not wrongly affect daily spiritual life.

Tragically, there are marriages in which one of the partners puts career before the wellbeing of the marriage, and the results can be disastrous. Once married, we are not free to introduce a third party—in this instance, an excessive devotion to our career—into the relationship. In those circumstances our own discipleship will undoubtedly suffer, and the lives of our spouse and children will be deeply affected. One of the best ways to examine ourselves is to ask honestly what Jesus must think of the situation, or ask how we would feel should our spouse develop an over-commitment of the same intensity.

The pattern

The Epistle to the Ephesians examines the love of Christ for his bride and thereby tells us the true secret of the good marriage.

We live in an age when, for many, to put anything before one's own freedom of choice is deeply resented. Therefore, it is common, when vows are taken in church, to omit the vow about obeying one's husband. What does Scripture teach us?

Ephesians 5 tells us by the Spirit that such an attitude of mind is far removed from the example of Christ. It is most worthwhile to consider the lessons. The bride of Christ should never resent the lordship of Christ. Indeed, that would be a denial of true discipleship. Our engagement to Christ brings willing and joyful submission to him. But, more than that, and even more astonishing, is the fact that Christ put the salvation of his bride before his own life—he "hath given himself" for it, and that was done for love's sake (v. 2).

A simple precept lies in verse 21, which removes all unhealthy competitiveness: “. . . submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God”. Hence, if a wife thinks of her husband as she does of Christ, and he gives all for the salvation of his wife, all will be well.

But supposing the husband is not in the Truth, what then? Peter tells us that the precept is still there: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Pet. 3:1). Our submission to Christ works wonders.

If in our own marriage we find ourselves struggling with behavioural problems, arising from ourselves or our spouse, then apply a God-provided remedy. Every night, before your evening prayers, read aloud together 1 Corinthians 13, and promise our Father that you will earnestly seek to live by it. There is an answer to most marriage problems in the manifold counsel of God within these verses. Do not simply read them, put them to God in prayer and promise to seek to live by them. Only good can come from such an exercise. The power lies in believing that this Divine instruction can work more than we can ask or think.

And the children?

When we beget children, we enlarge our household, and new responsibilities and privileges rest on our shoulders. These are ours from the time we decide to have children. This is inescapable. They are not there simply to be exercised should we feel like it. How do we truly go about this God-given task?

Pregnancy is not only a biological fact, it is a marvel. Beyond and before the usual tests and scans, there must be a deep realisation that we have brought an embryonic child into the world. More than ever we now have to devote ourselves in earnest to preparing ourselves to be parents. The life we lead during pregnancy must be worthy of the coming child. If we hope to be godly parents then we have to be godly expectant parents.

Almost certainly the tiny one will be affected by the style and nature of our lives. Prayer, daily devotion to the Word of God and our participation in ecclesial life will help to bring up the would-be parents in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Quarrelsome, self-indulgent or worldly pregnancies are not the way in which to prepare ourselves. Both Mary and Elizabeth had

minds full of God's Word and purpose, and they were abundant in their thankfulness and praise.

A new creature

From the thrusting pains of labour to the moment of the exultant, plaintive cry announcing, “I'm here”, to the indescribable comfort of nestling and suckling the new bundle of life, we come to know that truly, for the first time, husband and wife are surely one flesh. There is a new creature.

How soon do we begin to instruct our child? The process has begun already. The atmosphere of home and all that we do in it are parts of the information we are imparting to the little one. The sounds and sights of home from ourselves and elsewhere impinge in various ways on the newborn child. Those things which are our habits will impress more and more upon the virgin mind.

Reading aloud the daily readings and praying aloud in our daily prayers and thanksgiving for meals will say something about ourselves. The babe will 'listen'. Mother singing 'the songs of Zion' will console and comfort the child as part of mother's prayers.

The discipline of life will instruct by teaching that there are times of silence as well as times of sound. It is never too early to teach that life has a pattern and purpose by our regularity in the things that matter and our devotion to them. Very early the little one learns that No means No, and Yes means Yes. We teach that we are reliable and consistent. Love and care are indicated by words and actions.

A radio that is never switched off and a television that is forever flickering will tell a message of some kind. Leaving a child to be 'amused' by television is a dereliction of our parental duties. In the same way that little children recognise repeated music, so the mindless Babel of sounds leaves a chaotic mind.

There are just a few years early in a child's life when the mind belongs to the parents. All too soon the child will pass into other hands for a few hours of most days in the week. If, merely for the sake of convenience, we leave our child in the hands of a carer or child-minder, we are diminishing the precious time that should be ours. Other instruction will be imparted over which we have but little control.

It is right and good that those valuable years should be mostly the responsibility of mother. Through her the child will first learn about God

and Jesus and the Kingdom by a gradual and repeated process. They are years of privilege, the inestimable privilege of conveying eternal things and, in time, the way to salvation. It is to mother that the Lord has committed the opportunity to teach the things concerning eternal life. Mother, grasp this with firm and willing hands and pass on the things of life as regularly as daily meals. Read, pray and sing aloud. Even little children will glean in your field.

Mother teaches the joy and welcome she feels when her husband returns from work, and in this a little child learns to share.

Father

As provider and protector of the home for the household, father needs to ensure that mother is truly cared for, and that she is glad and content in the work of love she performs. He learns this by watching the nature and growth of motherhood. By talking each day about the whole day's events, he will support and share his wife's devotion and learn more and more about the child beyond what he experiences by holding, loving and talking to the little one.

Father is responsible for the spiritual tone and life of the home which his wife is constantly nurturing. It is never too early to do this. The times of reading, praying and talking together are essential acts of commitment. God is in our life together only as much as we are devoted to and dependent upon Him. If we exclude or neglect Him by the way we live, we are not living by faith; we will impoverish our lives, and eventually this will show in the behaviour of our child. Tiny seeds can produce a bitter harvest.

Father is the protector of the household and he is burden bearer. A wife has a right to expect such support; more than that, she delights in and relies on it. The world around us assails our precious home. If we are truly godly, then we can trust the Word which tells us that "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7).

Children

Amongst the many happy times when there are children around, one of the most significant is the family meal. At least once every day the family should eat together. The microwave and the 'teletable' must be abandoned. The household is one. Father will give the prayer, not merely habitual but such as the children will be

caused to think about and see the sincerity and warmth of the giving of thanks.

There must be conversation that includes everyone. This is family fellowship time. Questions and comments must be encouraged. It may be the time of the evening prayer for the younger children.

Regularly, every day, the family should take the daily readings in whole or in part, as is appropriate. The whole of the household is listening to God speaking to them. It is gleaning time as we glean in God's field "the handfuls of purpose" (Ruth 2:16). Families where this does not take place are going to be all the poorer in days to come. Children learn to read aloud and ask and answer questions together.

This spirit of togetherness is fostered by attending meetings together. Children learn that their father and mother are being instructed by God and are worshipping Him.

Discipline

All of us need chastisement, God tells us so. Children are no exception. Fathers are instructed not to provoke the children to wrath, by harsh or unrelenting criticism or by impossible standards. On the other hand, parents are not to let children do as they will and simply 'make up their own minds', as though this is superior to discipline and is a better way. It is not. We know the nature of our own hearts and the intense danger of letting the heart have its own way. Uninstructed minds will go astray.

Parents must keep the standards they set. The best standards are those which produce godliness.

A good discipline for the family is to read a chapter from Proverbs now and then and discuss the advice it gives.

Single parent households

These can arise from a variety of happenings: the tragic death of one of the parents, the break-up of a marriage, the birth of a child out of wedlock, for example. The circumstances will often determine what we do in daily life with our family. It is a fact of life that we cannot turn the clock back, and it does not help simply to lament our circumstances. Doing this we sap our strength and increase the darkness around us. What is the remedy?

When He was speaking to Israel about her widowhood, God said: "thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is His name . . . The God

of the whole earth" (Isa. 54:5). If we trust totally in Him and tell Him so, confessing our faults and making known our needs, God will make up our lack. He will never leave nor forsake us.

Understanding brethren and sisters will provide some help and support. The Citizens' Advice Bureau in the UK gives useful information about what practical help is available for people in diminished circumstances.

It is hard for children to cope without one of the two parents. This follows inevitably from the fact that God provided two parents as the natural and best environment for rearing children. At school these days there are always other children in similar circumstances, and teachers are aware of this and seek to be of help. Single parents must seek to compensate for the enforced deprivation in family life. Sunday school, youth groups in the meetings and attending as many meetings as possible will undoubtedly help to supply 'family' friendships. In the mercy of God we have the household of faith of which we are a part. We must learn to give by way of fellowship and particular friendships as well as to take that which is gladly supplied by others. This teaches our children the manifold blessings of having God as Father.

Reversal of parental roles

Either by limitations of health of one of the partners in a marriage, or by dint of economic pressures, sometimes father takes on mother's role, and the wife becomes the breadwinner. This is unnatural and necessarily incomplete. God made father and mother physically and mentally different, and that cannot be improved upon.

Therefore, when reversal of roles takes place, we have to accept certain limitations. More than that, we have to seek to limit the reversal as best

we can to come nearer to the ideal. Some duties are easily switched: preparing meals, cleaning, washing. Spiritual roles must not be reversed. Obviously, in role reversal situations, it is common sense to go back to normality whenever it is possible and convenient—for example, when the home has a full complement.

Our home

Ideally, it is good to regard our home as an annexe of the ecclesial home, because it is then run by the same principles and with the same aims. Thereby, too, we are seeking to benefit from God's over-arching care and blessings. All we have is from God and, as David said, we give God but His own (1 Chron. 29:14,16) when we devote it to Him in whatever way we find best for us.

The children of Israel had light in their dwellings when the land of Egypt lay under the plague of darkness. Let us make sure that the lamp of God burns brightly in our home in every room and place all the time.

Points for thought and discussion

- How soon should parents talk about baptism with their children?
- Have you made the Truth known to your next-door neighbours?
- Discuss the blessings and failings in David's family life.
- If there are more than two generations in your household, discuss the effect this has on daily life.
- Do you have real friends outside the Truth? Do they affect your discipleship and your family life?

Fellowcitizens: learning from Hezekiah

Nigel Bernard

THE LORD JESUS commanded his listeners to flee when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies. However, on occasions it was the right thing to remain in the city. Such an instance occurred in the reign of Hezekiah, when the city was threatened by the invading Assyrians. The Assyrians wreaked terror throughout the land, but God said: "Therefore

thus saith the LORD [Yahweh] concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD [Yahweh]" (2 Kgs. 19:32,33). This was to be a test for those dwelling in the land. The only place of