

Families Divided!



by
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God's plan is always best. He knows what is good for each person, each marriage, each family, and for society at large. In the beginning, the Lord wanted a man and a woman to marry, bear children, and raise those children in the nurture, discipline, and

love so that His will would be followed and bring glory to Him. Those who respect God and His Will seek to please Him in this way today.

Marital and Family Breakdown

Sadly, God's will concerning marriage and the family is largely ignored. Even among the people of God before Christ, we often observe marital and family strife. There was strife between Sarah and Hagar and between Rachel and Leah. There was disharmony between Moses and his brother and sister. Eli's sons as well as Samuel's sons were disobedient and rebellious. There was much strife and disrespect among David's children. Solomon often wrote of marital strife and disrespect of children in the book of Proverbs.

Few of us today, in our society, are untouched by the tragedy and pain of marital strife, separation, divorce, and family disintegration. The blessedness of marital unity and family harmony is seldom attained. However, in the midst of this breakdown, God's children must continue to work toward the fulfillment of His ideal will—loving, peaceful, harmonious, and blessed unity in marriage and family.

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Although God has always called for family unity and marital harmony, our Lord Jesus warned that He would bring division! He declared, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). In Luke 12:51, Jesus explains, "Do you suppose that I came to bring peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division." He says that when people come to Him to be His disciples, and to receive His forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, the result would be division between husbands and wives and between members of families.

Just what did our Lord mean by this serious forewarning? Jesus says, “I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household” (Matthew 10:35-36). He further describes the family division that would occur: “From now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:52-53).

Our Lord is saying that entire families will be separated through Him. Family and marital turmoil will come when one turns to Christ and others refuse to come.

Christ said that sometimes this division would be serious, with deadly consequences: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (Matthew 10:21-22; cf. Mark 13:12-13).

Many people will be so opposed to Jesus and His radical and righteous way of life, that they will hate true believers and go so far as to kill their own family members or betray them to cruel religious or civil authorities who will murder them. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name” (Luke 21:16-17). In communist China, Muslim lands, and other places, serious persecution now reigns!

Devotion to Christ Jesus in the Midst of Family

Division

When a dear husband or wife objects to our commitment to Christ, they may present an ultimatum: Either choose them or choose Jesus! A parent may make the same challenge to a son or daughter who chooses to follow the Lord Jesus as a true disciple. What must the follower of Jesus do? In all circumstances, he or she must choose to follow Jesus—regardless of consequences. There must be no compromise.

Christ makes this plain: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). This means that we must be willing to break dear bonds of marriage if we are faithful to the Lord Jesus. He went on to say, “He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it” (vv. 38-39). Our uncompromised devotion to Jesus means that all other loves and commitments are secondary.

Notice the way Jesus put this: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Our love for Jesus must be so intense that all other loves seem like “hatred” in comparison. We must be willing to leave everyone and everything behind to follow, love, obey, and serve God in Christ Jesus (Mark 10:28-30).



Division in this Life

The New Testament does show that sometimes entire families came to Christ—even at the same time. Luke suggests that the family of Cornelius came to Christ at the same time (cf. Acts 10:1-2, 24, 44-47). Later, Lydia and “her household” were baptized at the same time—and this may have included family members along with servants (16:14-15). The Philippian jailer also was baptized, along with his household (vv. 31-34). In Corinth, Crispus and “all his household” believed in the Lord (18:8). We also may remember that Aquila and Priscilla were a married couple who served the Lord extensively, together (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 26; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). This kind of marital unity is what God desires and promotes!

Sadly, we know that when Christ was preached, most people did not accept the message with a repentant faith (cf. John 6:60-69). Most turned away and rejected the offer of salvation (Matthew 7:13-27). Therefore, we see divided families reflected in Scripture. Paul speaks to the brother in Christ who is married to an unbelieving wife and to the sister in Christ who is married to an unbelieving husband (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). In this sad circumstance, the Christian must not deliberately leave the unbeliever (v.12), since the apostle says that the unbeliever is “sanctified” through the believer—evidently meaning that the unsaved spouse is under the holy influence of the Christian. However, if the unbeliever does leave on his own accord, the Christian may allow him to leave, thus establishing peace (vv. 15-16).

Peter likewise addresses the case of a Christian wife married to a disobedient or unbelieving husband. In this situation, the apostle says that the believer must be a model wife, showing entire submissiveness, chastity, respect, and a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:1-6). As difficult as it is, the Christian must do all she can to win the unbeliever to the Lord and live an exemplary life in Christ.

The Final Division!

Not only is there frequent division in marriages and divisions in families in this life, but there is a coming decisive and final division! Jesus describes the Great Judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46. He tells us that He will come in His glory as King and sit on

His glorious throne, with all the nations gathered before Him. Then He will “separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left” (vv. 32-33).

At this great and glorious end-time event, Jesus will declare to those righteous ones on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (v. 34). In contrast, the King will say to those unrighteous on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (v. 41). Jesus then says these lamentable words: “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (v. 46). Tragically, the division that occurred on earth when one family member turned to Christ Jesus and the other ones refused to repent and believe in Him, will become an eternal and hopeless separation!

What Can We Do Now?

We are still on earth and we are still alive! You want your dear husband or wife to be saved, you want your dear son or daughter to repent, you want your father and mother to come to Christ, and you want your extended family to know God. Never, never refuse to obey the Lord and His Word, for this hypocrisy will not bring your loved one to God. Live a consistent, devoted, faithful, and holy life before your loved ones. Use every opportunity to communicate the message of Jesus Christ to them and share the good news of salvation through His death and resurrection. This is the only means of their salvation (John 14:6).

Seek to be a devoted husband before your unsaved wife (Ephesians 5:25-33; 1 Peter 3:7). Determine to be a devoted wife before your unsaved husband (1 Peter 3:1-6; Ephesians 5:22-24; Titus 2:4-5). Be a respectful and obedient son or daughter before your parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), and be a devoted parent to your children (Ephesians 6:4). Be faithful to the Lord under all circumstances (Revelation 2:10), and be submissive to His Word in all that you do (John 14:15, 21-24; 1 John 2:3-6). Display the fruit of the Spirit in your relationship with them (Galatians 5:22-26). All of this should help you to have a good influence before your dear family members.

God does not guarantee that your family will come to Christ and be saved from their sins, but your consistent devotion to Him may have a great effect on their hearts. Be earnest in your prayers for their salvation (Romans 10:1-2). May God bless you as you seek their eternal salvation.