

**Good Stewardship #3;
Stewardship in Family Relationships**

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Well, this morning we want to continue for the Feast of Tabernacles in this series that I introduced to you two sermons ago on the topic of "good stewardship." Because stewardship has everything to do with this process of Christian conversion and our endeavors, now, in preparation for something grand and glorious that is pictured by this very Feast of Tabernacles and the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. And, so, if you will recall, after the overview on the principles of good stewardship to open, in the last message we went through the first and most important point in the accountability that God has given to each one of us, to you and to me, to be good stewards. And that responsibility is our personal calling—being responsible for the revelation of the Truth, the opening of the mind that God gave to us, and the necessity, then, to act upon that calling; to put God first in our lives; to put first things first in the order of our priorities in the decisions that we make; and never to compromise the Law of God.

And so this morning, we want to address another spiritual aspect of good stewardship and one that applies to every single one of us. And that is, "Stewardship in Family Relationships," because, as you are probably aware, the family, and the laws governing the family, are a direct reflection of that which will exist forever in the very Kingdom of God. Because the God that we serve *is* a Family. And, if you will remember, I mentioned to you before that not a single command of God is there for no purpose. God did not create His requirements—through commandments, statutes and judgements—as a way to make us jump through hoops. All of those laws are valuable and they are there for a reason. Obeying those laws brings benefits and blessings, and violating those cardinal principles brings automatic penalties—heartache, sorrow and disillusionment. And so the laws concerning family are there for us today as a reflection, and an insight, and a window into what

that Family of God in the Spirit world is like, and will be like, when millions and even billions are added to that expanded Family.

So let's begin in Ephesians chapter five and verse twenty-two because this is the number one place in the Bible where we have concentrated instructions, enunciated by the Apostle Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, concerning the family structure. This will set the stage, but I have a limited amount of time this morning so all I can afford to do is hit the high points because there are so many principles we want to cover at this Feast of Tabernacles. But we do want to do the best that we can to cover as much as possible. Ephesians 5 and beginning in verse 22:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife . . .

Why? Because God just arbitrarily decided to make it that way for no other reason than to make wives jump through hoops? No. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Oh, so we find out that the physical relationship between a husband and a wife is not just physical in nature, but actually represents something much more monumental and important: the relationship that exists in the Spirit between Jesus Christ and the Church. That very principle itself opens up an incredible amount of responsibility for the human beings who understand God's Truth, because then you come to find out that when we are dealing with those laws of marriage and the relationship between wives and husbands, we are dealing with something Holy and sacred in God's eyes. And, therefore, we should make no decision nor engage in any activity that violates those laws unless that is how we view the very God Family. Everything that we do within our marriages is a reflection of our opinion and our thoughts concerning the Family of God and concerning the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church. So, if we think about that more specifically when we are faced with challenges within those relationships, it should help bring to mind for us the gravity of how God views the decisions we are making within our marriages. It is a relationship of stewardship because God has given us responsibilities within those family relationships, and He is watching how we handle those relationships because it is a reflection of our ability to handle those greater, more significant, responsibilities in the Family of God in the time to come.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

"Husbands, love your wives . . ." Because this is not a one-way street. That marriage relationship, then, requires accountability on the part of both wives and husbands, and both men and women in those marriage relationships are absolutely being evaluated. And what we are doing is speaking volumes to God.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church . . ." So, Paul didn't leave the definition of real love here for human beings to determine for themselves, because human beings have their own nefarious concepts about love. It is that which you hear in music and see in movies and television presentations—what the world thinks is love. And I can tell you, brethren, that's not love at all. True love comes from God. It is a spiritual principle, and human beings without the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, cannot truly love. How can a human being, without the Holy Spirit, love, when love is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit? And the Holy Spirit is not given to those who are not part of the true Church—who have not been called and baptized into the very Body of Christ. So when we are speaking about real love—the kind of love that husbands are supposed to have for their wives, we are not talking about lust; we are not talking about any worldly concept which is a counterfeit for Godly love. That could be a series of sermons in and of itself.

"Husbands, love your wives [How?], even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Now, that sets a pretty high standard, don't you think, men? How did Christ love the Church? How did Christ manifest His love for each one of us? He gave Himself as a living sacrifice. He didn't treat that marriage relationship with the Church as a "fifty-fifty partnership," meaning, "Well, as long as you do your part, I'll ante up my part. But I will only give to you as much as you give back to me." No, as Mr. Armstrong taught us for years, that marriage relationship is not a fifty-fifty partnership, it is a one-hundred-one-hundred relationship—the husband giving one-hundred percent of himself to the wife, and the wife giving one-hundred percent of herself to the husband. And guess what? Even if you are married to someone who is not fulfilling his or her part of the bargain, that does not release you from fulfilling *your* part of the bargain. If they are willing and pleased to dwell with their mates, then those who are married to them have an absolute obligation to pour themselves out for their spouses, even as Christ did for the Church.

And how did Christ pour Himself out for us? When we were worthy? When we were, at least, doing something of value or offering something to Him in return? Not at all. He loved us and He gave Himself as a living sacrifice when we were the worst of the worst—unworthy in any way of His mercy. And, yet, He still gave Himself fully and totally and completely. *That* is love—that is the Godly love which the world cannot even begin to comprehend, let alone act upon. But those of you within the Body of Christ, you have an opportunity. How? By the Holy Spirit. You cannot do it without that Spirit—you cannot do it without that Spirit.

Yes, there have been a number of good marriages—at least by the world's definition—over many years, between those who are unconverted. And even as the Apostle Paul said in Romans chapter two, even the Gentiles—those who are separated from God, without His Holy Spirit—when they do by nature the things contained in the Law, become beneficiaries of the blessings. So, to the extent that human beings apply those laws in their lives—even being unconverted—they do receive the benefits. But it is impossible for marriage between a man and woman to have its fulness—the way God designed it—without two converted parties. That is the ultimate relationship because it is a Christ/Church relationship. And that means Jesus Christ, the fulness of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, interacts with the Church, His Body, which is also imbued with the Holy Spirit, according to the Holy Spirit. And so the ultimate, and only way, to truly fulfill the fulness of that relationship, as God designed it, is when it involves two converted people. But there is the possibility of blessings in marriage even when there aren't two converted people if, at least, many of those spiritual principles are being applied. But the ultimate is always among the converted because it is a spiritual relationship—not just a physical one at all.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Then skipping down to verse 31 because we are going to come back in a moment and read verses 28 and 29. But for now, the summary in verse 31:

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery . . .

Oh, and it certainly is. By what process do you take two individual, flesh-and-blood human beings and make them one—truly one, a single entity? They are neither the one who became the husband, nor the wife, but they are a newly created entity in the eyes of God—not having life separate from one another anymore. ". . . and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

You see, it's spiritual, not physical. The physical laws that we are required to obey speak to the spiritual realm and that which is going on in the very God Family. It speaks of the relationship even between the Father and the Son and perfect harmony through the Spirit, and that which is manifested between Christ and the Church—as a spiritual organism.

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Why? Because, husbands and wives, you are picturing the Family of God and God is watching—He is paying attention, and He is taking notes—because our behavior toward our spouses is telling Him how well we might, or might not, perform as stewards of those principles if we are given eternal life when Jesus Christ returns.

So we do have stewardship responsibilities within families, within marriages, and also concerning parents and children. Let's notice now, continuing in chapter six of Ephesians, the admonition of God's Law concerning the behavior of children toward parents. Ephesians 6 and beginning in verse 1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." That means, as those parents exercise authority according to God's Law, children are absolutely obligated to submit to that authority, even as a wife is required to submit to the authority of her husband "in the Lord"—meaning that as long as it does not require a violation of God's Law, that authority of the head of household stands firm and God backs it up. And so it is for children who have the obligation to obey "in the Lord."

"[F]or this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise." Yes, it's the first of the ten commandments with promise. What were the promises? Those who truly honor their father and their mother were promised a long life and prosperity. And how many elderly people today are paying penalties because they did not honor their parents? And now they have children who do not honor them. You see, brethren, what goes around, comes around, and as God said, "The sins of the fathers are passed down to the children to the third and the fourth generation." And this is probably a classic example. Violating those commands of respect for family authority brings penalties and heartache.

Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers . . .

Now, here is a counter command for parents—and especially fathers—toward children: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And so there is accountability and the requirement that parents use that authority wisely, because when we misuse it, we actually cause damage to that relationship and we can actually harm our children.

By our lack of wisdom in the exercise of authority, as husbands, as fathers and mothers, we can actually do damage and drive our children and our families apart. And so we have to be very, very careful. And, remember, it is Jesus Christ who is the standard for the use of that authority. He has the ultimate authority over the Church and yet, how does He use it? With extreme love, patience, meekness, kindness and forbearance. Just stop and think, now. If Jesus Christ dealt with the Church as some of us might be inclined to deal with our wives, or with our children, would we like that kind of relationship with Christ? Or are we always incredibly appreciative of His mercy and His longsuffering? That is precisely the way that family authority should be used. The importance of all of these roles: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and children, cannot be emphasized too much. And God is watching and He is weighing, and it is speaking to Him of the progress that we either are, or are not, making in learning to be good stewards of those responsibilities in this life.

So let's do a quick overview now, and I am going to begin by picking on the husbands. 1 Timothy five and verse eight. Husbands have a responsibility as head

of household and God made it that way, and that responsibility includes providing for and taking care of those wives and those families. And that is a dual responsibility. It's both physical and it is spiritual. It's not just physical, it is spiritual as well. But let's look at the physical part. 1 Timothy 5 and beginning in verse 8:

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Why is that principle so critical to God? Again, would our great God—the Father in heaven—ever abdicate His responsibility to take care of His spiritual Family? Would He fail to honor His obligation to provide loving care and leadership for all of those children who are going to be born into that Family? No way. Will He accept anyone into that Family who has abdicated *his* responsibility to care for and to provide for his family? Not a chance. It is that critical. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." This tells you, men, that it doesn't matter if we are members of the church and we are doing all of these wonderful things to support other people in the church—to help them and to sacrifice for them—if we are neglecting our responsibilities toward our own families, God says we are worse than an infidel. It applies physically, yes. Husbands are supposed to provide for their families—they are supposed to be the supporters and breadwinners—and I know that this Babylonian system that we live under in this world makes it incredibly difficult today to fulfill God's will. Because it is the design of Satan and the nations that he inspires to create circumstances so that women are forced into the workplace—to prevent men from being able to fulfill their role as God designed it, and to force women into a role they were never designed for.

And I really don't care how chauvinistic that sounds. I don't think Jesus Christ would be accepted by any of these so-called "enlightened" people of the world who want to treat men and women as if they are equals in their assigned duties and responsibilities in this life. Men and women are equal before God in their opportunity to receive salvation and to become a part of that Kingdom. They are equal in their opportunity to have royal membership in that Family and to wear crowns of glory and to have awesome responsibility. But that is at the time when there will be no male and female, because they are not male and female in the Kingdom of God. In essence, they are all called Sons of God, but it's not a matter of gender. And so men and women are both preparing now—those who are a part of the firstfruits harvest—for their roles of great power and glory and awesome

responsibilities in the Family of God. But then He gave physical men and women differing jobs in order to qualify. And He made husbands head of the household. It's not discriminatory—it's not belittling women—because a marriage that is being orchestrated according to the principles of God is an incredible blessing both for the husband and the wife. Why? Because the husband isn't using his authority inappropriately for selfish purposes. That wouldn't bring happiness for either one. And the wife is not trying to usurp that authority of the husband, but they are working harmoniously together in their appropriate roles, and they both are being benefitted and blessed. Both are working as good stewards of their marriage, then, toward the ultimate goal of receiving that reward in the Kingdom of God.

It does apply physically, then, to the responsibility of men to take care of their families. And so they should be providers—they should provide for the needs, physically, mentally and emotionally of those families. And if we are not doing that, men, we are falling down on the job.

From the physical standpoint it is my strong recommendation, if you are a young man—or even if you are an old man—and you are single and eligible to be married, that you do not seek to have a wife if you are not prepared to support her and to take care of her and to fulfill the duties that God requires of husbands. And there may be some individuals who are not really in a position to be able to handle that responsibility. And if you are not, don't take on the task. Better to be single than to be married and fail to exercise the responsibility which represents Jesus Christ in His relationship with the Church; better to stay single and to apply yourself to overcoming and putting on the fruits of the Holy Spirit so that you *can* become capable and skilled and wise enough to marry and have a wife and family. But it is a serious decision to make.

Proverbs six and verse six. Proverbs 6 and beginning in verse 6. This gives us an insight into the physical aspects of the responsibility to be industrious. And, yes, God requires both men and women to be industrious, but right now I'm picking on the men because of their responsibilities as head of the household:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

We are admonished to look at the ant, which is simply a creature acting by instinct, and yet, its behavior is that which we are supposed to use as a model. Which says what? We take responsibility for working hard and providing for the needs of the future, and that means, men, we can't be lazy. We need to work hard; we need to apply ourselves for those families and pour ourselves out as living sacrifices. And that means we had better be workers—we had better not be ones that sit at home, unless we have a legitimate disability. And some do. They have health impairments and they are not physically able to get out and work. But that is the exception to the rule, not the rule. If you are able bodied—if you are capable—you have a responsibility to work and to get out there and hustle. That's what God requires of us all.

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Yes, there are automatic penalties that come from being slack—from a failure to get out and work and to be industrious—and especially as it applies to those who have family responsibilities. Maybe it's not so bad when you are single, but, boy, men, if you have a wife and you have children, you had better be out there hustling and working. You had better be giving it all that you can to provide for that family.

But, then, it is not just a command of the flesh; it's not just being the breadwinner, bringing home a paycheck; your responsibility does not stop just because you hand the check to your wife when you walk across the threshold and then you have the right to sit in the armchair and watch a football game and totally ignore the rest of your responsibilities to your family—unless we think that's how Jesus Christ behaves toward the Church, and I don't think any of us believe that, do we? Our work is not over just because we go out and work our nine-to-five, or whatever our hours might be, to bring home a paycheck. The real obligation—because it's a spiritual relationship, not a physical one at all—starts with the spiritual and emotional support of wives and children. And, men, if you are not providing it, you are falling down on the job.

Now, I'm not just preaching at you, I'm preaching at myself, I just want to make that clear. These principles are so important, I need to be adamant, but they apply to us all because we all fall short of the perfect example of Jesus Christ. And I

have to work continually on myself—it's a part of my annual evaluation of how I am dealing with my marriage and family responsibilities. So we are all in this together, men. But I'm not going to lighten up on you any more than I'm going to lighten up on myself. We all have that obligation if we want to be there in the Kingdom of God—that's how serious this is. We are stewards and God is watching and evaluating. We have to show compassion—real Godly love—for our wives. Let's notice back again in Ephesians chapter five and we will start in verse twenty-five, now, and pick up the verses we skipped over before. Ephesians 5 and beginning in verse 25:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word . . .

And that's more than just saying the words, "Well, honey, I love you," and then going about and participating in the kind of behavior which proves that you don't really care enough about her to put her first. Verse 27:

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. *So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.* He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, *even as* the Lord the church [emphasis added].

And so, men, if you *really, truly* see your wives as a part of yourselves, you will be doing these things because, remember, we have already seen that God made them one flesh. When you made that marriage covenant before God, you ceased to be one, by yourself, and you became a new entity together with your wife, and the two of you are not separate individuals in the eyes of God at all. You are one, even as Christ is one with His Church. How is He one with the Church? Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which flows between them. And so husbands and wives become one whether we take that responsibility seriously and act that way or not. In the eyes of God we are one and we can never and will never be two again. That's how serious that decision to get married is.

All too many have made those vows very flippantly and without strong consideration of the weight of the responsibility. That doesn't mean that the vows

weren't upheld. God holds us accountable for all of our vows, whether we took them seriously and understood their full ramifications and gravity, or not—it doesn't matter. He holds us accountable for those vows, but especially so once we come to understand the significance of that marriage relationship. No matter what we've done in the past, we have an opportunity to begin walking forward now into the future and begin living by those principles and applying them. If you have a spouse who is still willing to live with you—even if they are not converted—you have an opportunity, no matter what's happened in the past, to apply these principles and give them time to bear fruit. That is the blessing of God's marvelous way. But the key ingredient is real love—real love which is not selfish. It's an outpouring concern for the other person, even as Mr. Armstrong taught us for all of those years. It's the way of "give" and not the way of "get." And when we run into problems in our marriages, very often at the heart of the problem is that we are being selfish, rather than self-sacrificing, toward our mate. And, men, you are the head of the household. You are the one that God holds accountable for those families, which is why I am impressing this upon you especially.

First Peter three and verse seven. 1 Peter chapter 3 and beginning in verse 7: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge . . ." What knowledge? The knowledge of God's laws—true knowledge, not the wisdom of this world. Forget all of these self-help books about marriage. That's a bunch of tripe—it's useless—because they are separated from God and they don't understand the first thing about real marriage. Marriage comes from God—it represents the God Family—so how can deceived human beings understand or even begin to comment wisely about marriage? They cannot. Your marriage handbook is the Bible; your marriage handbook is the teaching concerning that relationship that we received, beginning with the chosen apostle in this age. There is your handbook. Forget all of the other garbage.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge [that means God's Truth—His laws], giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel.

God called the ladies weaker vessels, not because they are inferior in mental capacity or abilities. Not at all. But He made women to need the support and the strength of a father and then of a husband, and that is how they thrive and accomplish their best. God made it that way. It isn't my rule, it's the way He designed it. And when we are outside of that configuration—either through our

own fault or through no fault of our own—there are penalties that automatically come. And those of you, ladies, who are outside of the benevolent leadership of a converted husband or a husband that understands enough of these principles to do the best that he can, those of you who are by yourselves, having to fend for yourselves, you understand that it is not the ideal situation. You may be forced into that—you may not have any other choice. Then you have to do the best that you can. But it is not the way God intentionally designed it.

"[G]iving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." Yes, men, you had better remember that your wives—your converted wives—are also in this process of overcoming and qualifying for the Kingdom of God. So don't think that because you are the head of the household or that they might be physically weaker than you are, and they have a different emotional makeup by God's design, that you have some higher priority in God's mind as far as your hope for the Kingdom of God. No, you don't. Men, we may find our wives in a much higher office in the Kingdom of God than ourselves—if we even make it. Maybe the wives are going to make it in some cases and the husbands are not. And the opposite also might be true. ". . . giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." Yes, if you are both converted, then you are working together collectively toward your salvation, but you are not going to go into the Kingdom as couples. No, God is going to judge each one of us as individuals based upon our own personal fruits, but how glorious—how absolutely glorious—is a marriage between two converted individuals who are working to overcome the natural self and to fulfill those God-given roles. It is an unbelievable opportunity for satisfaction.

. . . ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

What is the first result of a converted husband who is falling down on the job in the way that he deals with his wife? Your prayers are cut off from the throne of God. It's kind of a scary thought, isn't it? Men, if you are not fulfilling your obligation to your wife, you might as well forget praying. Don't even bother. Do not waste your time coming before the throne of God. He will not hear if we are being slack in our obligation to love and to support and to help our wives—to be living

sacrifices for them, even as Christ is a living sacrifice for the Church. We had better be committed to that, or don't even bother thinking we are going to have a personal relationship with Christ. We will not. That's how serious it is.

Ephesians five and verse two. Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 2: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us . . ." That's the overriding consideration. If you are ever in doubt about what the right thing to do is—and we run into many of those questionable situations in which we are not sure what to do—always remember, we behave with our authority, that God-given authority, as Christ did. That authority can be used for good or for bad, but if we want to apply it as God intended, then we do it as Christ uses His authority.

. . . walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

What kind of love is that? Take time to read on your own 1 Corinthians chapter 13, which we have always referred to for decades in the church as the "love chapter." It's where you will find how God simply defines real love.

And then Colossians 3:19 says: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Be not bitter against them. Does that mean be not bitter just as long as she is doing everything she should? No. When you marry a wife, you have no guarantee what decision she ultimately will make. You just don't. And, wives, the reverse is also true with your husbands. It's probably the reason that the Apostle Paul made certain of those statements to the Corinthians which some interpret as being anti-marriage, and they were not. But he was saying, "You're better off being single." Why, because he was opposed to marriage? No. Marriage represents that God-relationship with the Church and what we hope to achieve for all eternity in God's Family. So he was certainly not against marriage. But Paul was addressing the severity of the penalties that can come for violation of those marriage vows. Any time you choose to make a vow to be bound to another individual, you see, you are not in control of that person's mind. You are putting yourself at risk when you marry because no matter how converted that man or that woman seems to be at the time, you have no guarantee that they may not flake out and do, who knows what? And some of you are now single—living alone—because you have a spouse who is no longer willing to dwell with you, perhaps because of your religious beliefs, perhaps for other reasons. But you understand and recognize that you were bound to that mate, as one flesh before God, and that you are not free to re-marry as long as that

party is alive. And, therefore, because you fear God more than your desire to have a companion, you are living singly—as Paul called it, "eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake." Who are the eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake? Those who remain celibate because they do not have a spouse who is willing to live with them. They are not free to marry. And we have a number of those, in that classification, within this small remnant body, who respect the marriage laws that God laid down and they are not willing to trade their crown of glory in the future for the sake of physical companionship and pleasure for a season. And I commend those of you who are walking in that difficult way because of your love for the Truth of God.

And so Paul pointed out the fact that if you can live singly, you are better off in one way. What way is that? Because you are always in control of your own personal life. It's between you and God and the use of the Holy Spirit. And if changes need to be made, you are in control of making them. But you are never in control of making changes in the life of another person—and especially your spouse. That man or that woman has to be just as motivated to overcome in their life as you are, and you can't control them. And when you marry, you may find that your spouse ultimately chooses not to walk in that way or to fulfill those obligations. You do not have control, nor any guarantee, which means that when you marry, you are taking a step that you cannot take back, no matter what happens. That's the way it is. But, then, God absolutely expects us to live up to that obligation, no matter what—no matter whether or not you get an ounce of love or respect in return, it matters not. We are to behave as Jesus Christ behaved—a living sacrifice, expecting nothing in return.

Now, if you get love and respect in return then you are incredibly blessed. You are incredibly blessed. And you have an opportunity to picture in your own family relationship that which will exist in the very Kingdom of God—even though we are all weak and none of us are worthy. We make mistakes, but, boy, what a picture it is.

What about the wives? Titus two and verse four. Titus chapter 2 and beginning in verse 4: "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands . . ." There is the same kind of love that husbands are supposed to have for their wives. You review also 1 Corinthians chapter 13 to see what that love is really like.

"[T]o love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home . . ." Well, that's not what the world says women should do, is it? No, the world tells us all, with their propaganda, that for women to really be happy, they have to get out into the workplace and have their own careers in order to be fulfilled, personally. That's not what God said. The feminist movement hates the concept of the Bible, but especially Titus 2:5. "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." In this day and age—in this system—brethren, many of you wives do not have any other choice. I understand that. You may not have any other choice, at this time, but to be in the workforce in order to support or to help your family financially. These are difficult times. But never forget, it's not the way God intended it to be. It's not the way He wants it to be. And never forget those principles, even if, for a time, we are unable to apply them in totality, physically.

First Peter three and verse one. 1 Peter chapter 3 and beginning in verse 1: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word . . ." Now, this is talking about a wife who has an unconverted husband. "Be in subjection to your own husbands." Just because your husband is not in the church, it doesn't mean that you are not under his authority. That is God-given authority—a husband over a wife—regardless of which one, or neither, or both, might be in the church. So women in the church, don't think that you can overthrow that authority of your husband unless, and only if, he requires you to compromise what God requires of you as a Christian. You have to obey God first.

Be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word [meaning he is not called to this Way of Life as yet], they also may without the word be won by the [not "conversation," but "conduct"] of the wives.

Oh, you see, because a wife who is really applying these principles of God's Law and being respectful of her husband and pouring herself out as a living sacrifice, is setting an example—not nitpicking, not harping on his weaknesses and his faults. And husbands and wives, don't we all have a tendency to get into that the longer we are together? As the old saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt." By the natural flesh, that is what we are inclined to do, and we can end up in that state without even realizing it. "The euphoria is over; the honeymoon is over; finally we are into the routine, after a few years of marriage, of putting up with each other. And the things

that seem to stick out most are the faults and the little things that annoy us about each other." But that is not where we are supposed to be focused, and so, converted wives, even if you have an unconverted husband, you have an opportunity to really have a positive relationship with your husband if you will apply these principles—even if he is not called to be in the church. In most cases, those unconverted husbands will respect the changes that they see in your life because it benefits them. The same thing goes for converted husbands with wives who are not in the church.

. . . they also may without the word be won by the [conduct] of the wives; While they behold your chaste [conduct] coupled with fear.

How many people outside the church have a respect for many of you? Not because they understand why you do what you do, but they sure like the fruits. Because of your fear for God, you are honest and you don't take advantage of others. And if you are behaving that way—upholding these laws within your marriages—then there is a good chance that your unconverted spouse is also going to be very, very pleased, even if they don't understand necessarily the reasons why.

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.

And, I'm sorry, women, this is stated here by the Apostle Peter—who was very blunt in his orientation—because that's the way women are. Now there are a lot of men out there who are that way too—they are too concerned with their outward appearance rather than the things that really count on the inside. But, of course, this is always attributed more to women. But, certainly, here Peter made this comment toward women, so I am not going to call it chauvinistic, are you? But he is warning the women, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, about being all-concerned with the way we look on the outside. And what is the common thing we hear today? "Women don't dress for men, they dress for other women." You see, it's a social status thing that can creep in naturally. We are more concerned about how we look and how we interact within the social structure—even with other women. Because a lot of the guys are probably like me, and I am pretty oblivious to stuff. I don't see details with things. You can ask me about something you saw and I didn't even notice. My wife tunes in on things a lot more than I do in that regard. She notices details. And I think a lot of women probably have that proclivity. That can be used as a strength; that can be

used for a Godly purpose, but it can also be used for a wrong purpose, and one of the wrong purposes is being overly consumed with our outward appearance and making that the focus of what we do—being concerned with how we look on the outside to others.

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel." That doesn't mean it is wrong to wear jewelry, but it should be conservative. God, in the Old Testament, describes symbolically the way He dressed His bride, Israel, and it included jewelry—including earrings. But it should be that which is conservative, and it should not draw attention to itself. Any clothing—and this applies to both men and women—can be wrong if we use it incorrectly. It should not overly draw attention. But, especially women, it should be appropriate.

. . . or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart [make the character that you are building inside the most important priority of your focus], in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of [here's what we should be wearing] a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price [a meek and a quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price]. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.

And a lot of women would laugh at this: "Oh, so you want me to call my husband lord?" It's not the words that count, ladies. It's our attitude; it's the way we think about the office of our husband. He has an office—a God-given office—over that family and we are expected and required to honor it.

Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

That means, ladies, that if you use and apply these principles in your marriages, then you too will not be hindered in your relationship with God. But if you are not living up to your obligations as a wife—submitting to your husband "in the Lord" (those who are pleased to dwell with you)—then you, as well as the men, have some serious work to do.

We don't have time to go through Proverbs 31, but read it yourself—the "Proverbs 31 wife"—because it lays out very specifically the characteristics of a woman who is fulfilling ideally that responsibility within her family. Respect and honor for the husband. It doesn't mean that she remains "barefoot and pregnant"—that she is without capability or opportunity to apply her intelligence and her strengths. Not at all. You will find that the Proverbs 31 woman is incredibly capable. She conducts business on behalf of her husband. It is always under his authority, but he delegates it to his wife who proves that she can handle that responsibility. And what are we speaking of? Stewardship. Wives have an opportunity for stewardship—an obligation for stewardship—under their husbands authority and jurisdiction. And God is watching that to see how we apply it. The Proverbs 31 woman—you will have to read it for yourself—conducts business on behalf of her husband; she is trustworthy; she sets a good example so that her husband becomes glorified in the eyes of others because of her conduct; she takes care of her family; she looks to the future, working diligently, working hard, not spending her days sitting on the couch watching soap operas or all of these other things (I picked on the men with the football game, so I have to get that in for the women too). But, no, women are supposed to be industrious—they are supposed to work hard; they are supposed to provide for those families. God intended the wife and the mother to be the manager of the home. It's under the auspices of the husband, the same way that Jesus Christ works under the auspices of the Father. But the Father doesn't do all of the work Himself. No, He has delegated it to the Son, and it is Jesus Christ who has been the intermediary as the God with whom man deals, and that is an awesome responsibility. In like manner, husbands can delegate—and should be able to delegate—to their wives when they have the capability, the motivation and the discipline to manage the house, the home. It is an awesome responsibility and, oh, how those families are blessed who apply those principles. They certainly are.

The responsibility of parents and children. I am almost out of time so I have to push this in very quickly at the end. Proverbs twenty-two and verse six. Proverbs 22 and verse 6—the responsibility of parents, which relates to stewardship. And God is watching us, parents, and what we do in relationship to our little ones. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." That means, set the example and teach them right principles—not wrong principles. And that teaching, brethren, is not just speaking the words, it's in how *you* behave; it's how *you* make decisions in your lives, which, really, is doing the greatest amount of the teaching. Because you can talk at them, and you can have all of the personal

Bible studies in your home that you want, but then, if you walk away and make personal decisions which are counter to those principles, that is going to speak volumes more than your words.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." And that is not saying that when he or she becomes an adult, they are not going to stray away from it. Many children in the church have strayed away and have not continued in that Way once they got out on their own, but guess what? If you do what you are supposed to do when they are little, and you teach them, one day it will still come back to them. Because they may try and push it off like it doesn't matter, but they do hear. And if your example has been good, it will make an impression on them, and one day they will come back. That is something that we can have confidence and assurance in.

Matthew seven and verse nine. Matthew chapter 7 and beginning in verse 9:

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

So we have to be concerned about our children's welfare and about providing the support and nurturing environment that they need to thrive. And there are all too many children who have been put at a disadvantage and are paying the price because of their parents' abdication of and negligence in fulfilling parental responsibility. Colossians 3:21 says, "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." It's an easy thing for us to do—even inadvertently—in our zeal for our children to do the right thing. But it takes wisdom to know how to apply it and not to cross this line which God calls "provocation." Because if we are not very careful, we can actually push our children away.

No parent is perfect, and we all fall down on the job. I am going to get to find that out in a couple of years when my boys enter the teenage years. So I do not claim to be a parental expert. I think my wife and I have done fairly well with them as youngsters but I make no guarantees about what is in the future. I know what I want to do; I know what I am expected to do; I know what God requires me to do, but I am going to be asking for His incredible wisdom and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to

help me to do my part in giving those boys the best chance they can have for their future. I know it is especially hard in these days.

Children. Colossians three and verse twenty. What are the responsibilities of children? Brethren, I am not just talking about little ones, and I am not just talking about teenagers and children who are still under the authority of parents in their household, I am talking to children who have parents who are still alive. Colossians 3:20: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." No, when you get out on your own and God makes you accountable for yourself, there is a transition that occurs for the men in God's thinking—according to His will. Women are always under the authority of a man. Women may not want to hear that, but the transition for women comes from a father to a husband. That's where we get the tradition of the father giving away the bride. Do you know why that is? It's based upon the Biblical principle that the woman is always under the authority of a man. That's the way God has designed it. So if a woman is not married—and it doesn't matter if she is twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years old—she is under the authority, still, of her father. That's the Godly principle. It doesn't fly in this world, does it? But that's the Truth. "Children, obey your parents in all things." So the men grow up and they go out on their own. God intended for them to go out and have their own families. They then become responsible before God as head of household, but always they must have respect for those living parents. No matter how old you get, if you have a living parent, you have an absolute obligation to revere them, to help them, to take care of them, and to be respectful toward those parents.

Exodus 21:15: "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death." That's how serious it is. And it doesn't mean just striking them physically, because if we know that hatred is akin to murder, what do we think any expression of hate toward a parent is in the eyes of God? We had better be very cognizant.

All of these things are a part of the stewardship that God is evaluating in our lives. So, as husbands, as wives, as fathers, as mothers and as children, we each have an obligation to fulfill these commands of God. And God is evaluating how we handle these assignments, now, which are small in comparison to those which He offers us in the future. If we show that we can respect and fear God in keeping these laws that govern family relationships, and we apply ourselves diligently in fulfilling those commands, then we will show God that we can be stewards of the little things and, therefore, will receive the great blessings of responsibility in His coming Kingdom.