



## Deuteronomy 6:4-9

### A Wholesome Family

The family is the basic social unit around which everything in society revolves. As the family goes so goes society. If you destroy the family you will destroy civilization. A strong wholesome family is the strength of society.

Dr. Nick Stinnett at the University of Nebraska studied the characteristics of strong wholesome families in different societies around the world. Instead of studying the dysfunctional family, he wanted to know what were the strengths of a healthy family. He chose in his research only families that had two characteristics: those marriages that were considered happy and those that considered themselves satisfied in their parent-child relationships. Dr Stinnet discovered several common qualities in these marriages including:

1. They are committed to the family social unit.
2. They spend quality time together as a family.
3. They have good communication skills within the family.
4. They consistently express appreciation to each other.
5. They apply problem-solving skills in times of crisis.
6. They have a commitment to a wholesome spiritual life.

I have observed these same qualities in my own family and in others through the years. The Word of God also emphasizes many of these same characteristics. Let's begin a series of messages on the Christian family by looking at our responsibilities.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES IN A WHOLESOME FAMILY (6:4-6)**

In his great sermon to the congregation of Israel at the end of his life Moses declared, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus called this great passage "the first and great commandment." It is a command to love the LORD God. Because they love Him they will have a life-long fear, or reverence, and obey Him.

#### ***We must learn to love the LORD God as a priority (v. 4-5)***

Verse 4 speaks of the *Shema*, which comes from the Hebrew word translated "Hear." It is a reminder of the great commandment that is the major confession of faith in Judaism. "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" More literally the Hebrew idea is, "the Lord, our God, the Lord, one." It is "the fundamental truth of Israel's religion." The Jewish people believed that "the Lord" (*Yahweh*) is totally unique, one in essence and that He alone is God. He is unlike any other deity. To the Jewish person there are no other gods. They are nothing.

Pagan neighbors that surrounded Israelites believed in polytheism. These "gods" were always warring with one another. Each pagan god was unpredictable and morally fickle. He never knew which side to be on and therefore was quickly changing gods to avoid their wrath. The Israelites believed in only one God who dealt with them in a consistent righteous standard contained in the Mosaic Law.

The word for "God" is plural (*elohim*), possibly implying the Trinity, and "one" (*ech-ad*) suggests harmony in the God-head. The plural in the context is not referring to more than one God, but the fullness of the Godhead. *Echad* always denotes "compound unity," one in the sense of unity. There is Divine unity in the Trinity. He is the only Yahweh; there is none other. It is to Him alone that the name rightfully belongs. Instead of the convoluted warring among the pagan deities, the LORD is One suggesting perfect unity of the Persons of the Godhead.

There were no gods like Yahweh. The children of Israel had discovered that the Egyptian deities were nothing. They were powerless. They were hopeless. There is nothing with which to compare Him. They had come into the presence of the living LORD. He was a reality to them. To Him alone belongs the name Yahweh. He is the One absolute God.

There was none other like Him. When He spoke there was none to challenge Him. When He made a pledge there was none to cancel Him. When He brought judgment upon His people, there was no other refuge. He is unique, the One and only omnipotent sovereign LORD.

Our fundamental duty is to respond to His love. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (v. 5). The repeated command is to have an intimate love relationship with the LORD. (Cf. 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). The idea is to love Him with the whole person—body, mind and soul. We love Him because He first loved us. "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16). God has demonstrated that sacrificial love by sending His only begotten Son to die in our place on the cross.

"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart" (v. 6). How do you keep God's Word "on your heart"? You do it by meditating on it. Only as we know it and apply it to our own personal lives can we teach it to our families. The Word of God must first be in our own mind and heart then we impress them diligently upon the minds of our children. "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." There is no other way to do it. They have to become a part of you and your lifestyle.

The "heart" is the seat of our emotions in general and love in particular. The "soul" is the center of our personality. When we love the Lord, it is something we do it with our whole personal being.

### ***How can we experience a growing love for God?***

Love grows through a deepening understanding, a better knowledge of the other person, his thoughts and actions, and then expressing through verbalization that new discovery. "I love you because . . ." "I love the way you . . ." What are concrete reasons for loving Him? Reasons for love increase the feelings. Making new discoveries about the person adds to the content of love. Love will grow as reasons for love are discovered, thought about, expressed verbally and remembered. Read God's Word, write it down, speak it out by sharing it with your family, friends and colleagues and you will grow in your love for Him.

This is our first responsibility. We are to keep His words on our heart, to think on them, to meditate on them, to reflect on them. We cannot give our children what we do not possess. We cannot pass along what we do not own. No one else can do it for us. Our children's programs, Sunday School and public school cannot assume that responsibility. It is our responsibility as parents. We are to love the Lord with all our heart and to share that love with our children.

Our children are watching us and modeling our attitudes and behaviors. They are parroting back our attitudes about Christ and His church. We cannot train up children to love the Lord with all their heart if we do not first love Him.

We cannot be healthy wholesome parents until God re-parents us. Spiritual growth has to take place in our own lives. Do you have an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you love His church? Is He the priority of your life? The words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 are a good commentary of this passage. He said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Strong Christian families believe in, value the Word of God, and model it in their personal lives because they love Him. You cannot teach what you do not have. I pray you will set a priority in your personal life and in your home to love the Lord with your entire person. Furthermore, Moses admonished the children of Israel to become role models of this love in their homes. If you love Him, you will obey Him.

## **ROLE MODELS IN A WHOLESOME FAMILY (6:7-9)**

### ***You teach from your lifestyle (v. 7).***

"You shall teach them diligently to your sons" (v. 7). The idea of teaching children by repetition is a theme that runs throughout the book. P. C. Craig reminds us, "The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. In summary, the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of man." The word "diligently" means "to sharpen," to pierce through, to give a sharp edge, like sharpening a knife. It is an intensely strong command with the idea of an assertive teaching process in a family setting. The Amplified Bible reads, "You shall whet and sharpen them, so as to make them penetrate, and teach and impress them diligently upon the [minds and] hearts of your children . . ." The NIV translates, "You shall impress them on your children." When we "sharpen" our children spiritually we are preparing them to discern from God's Word how to live in a pagan society. We make them keen and sharpen their perception of spiritual things. This teaching is to be done anytime of the day and anywhere as the teaching opportunity arises so that it sharpens our sons and daughters in their spiritual life. It is teaching from your lifestyle. Because you live it daily you can't help but teach it to those whom you love. It is part of our new spiritual nature in Christ.

### ***Talk about spiritual things in your home.***

Moses stresses that parents "talk" about spiritual things in an easy-going conversational style. The stress is not on formal teaching and training here, but you 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). He doesn't say lecture them or beat up on them with a Bible. The idea is in your casual conversation talk about the things of God. Let it be part of your lifestyle. Be ready to seize the teaching opportunity at breakfast, the normal interruptions during the day, at mealtime and at bedtime. Don't force it down their throats, but on the other hand don't be afraid to speak up and seize the moment. Talk to them the way you talk about the football game last night, or the baseball game, or the fun time you just had with them.

Moses is saying let loving the Lord be a natural part of your daily life. You are a poor model for your children if the only thing they hear about God and the church is when you are busy verbally running down people in it. Teach your children to love the Lord in *everything* they do, every day.

In order to accomplish this you may need to work on communication skills. If you must always respond, or have the answer, or make everyone in your family think the way you think, perhaps it would be very helpful if you just *listen* and not say a word until the other person is completely finished. This is true especially if you have teens in your house. Just listen! Don't say a word. Learn to listen so you can take advantage of the opportunity to teach.

Moses says, "when you sit in your house" at mealtime, cook outs, back packing, picnics, going for a walk in the park or in the woods, fishing, etc. Let your conversation about spiritual things be spontaneous sharing. What has

the LORD been doing in your life? What is God doing for you as an adult? How has God provided for you, perhaps a new job, a career change, your spiritual life, the fruit of the Spirit, a promise that God has fulfilled in recent days? "When you sit in your house" is probably referring to your leisure time.

### ***Seize the teaching moments in life***

"When you walk by the way." What do you talk about while in the car? As you journey through life observe people and situations all about you and seize the teaching moment to share the difference Christ makes in your life.

"When you lie down and rise up" probably refers to those quiet moments before you go to sleep. There have been many times when our whole family has piled on the bed laughing and talking about the day. Inevitably, it opens teachable moments on how the day went. Look for those moments and capitalize on them any time of the day. Let it be part of your lifestyle.

### ***Your life is an open book to be read by all (v. 8).***

"And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be a frontals on your forehead." Jewish rabbis during the days of Jesus took verse eight literally and tied phylacteries on their clothing. These were little leather boxes in which were placed verses of scripture written on parchment. Moses is not talking about adorning ourselves with religious jewelry. Again, he is emphasizing the need to continually teach the Word of God. Let God's Word be bound up in all we do and think. Your life is an open book that is read daily by your family.

"And you shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates" (v. 9). The mezuzah was a small box containing a parchment of Scripture. He is not talking about plaques around the house and on the mailbox or welcome mat. Let the Word of God be written upon your lifestyle. Let the Lord demonstrate that His love is in your home. If you love the Lord and demonstrate that in the fruit of the Spirit you will be a winning parent.

I thought how I might illustrate this great commandment. Let's look for a moment at a family that puts Moses' teaching into daily practice.

## **REMEMBERING A WHOLESOME FAMILY (Luke 2:39-51)**

How would you have liked having Jesus as a child or as a teen with all the responsibility that went along with that assignment? Could our home stand up to the test? Is it any different than Mary and Joseph's?

### ***The home of Jesus (Luke 2:39)***

They were not half-hearted in their observance of spiritual things. The parents of Jesus "performed everything according to the Law of the Lord . . ." (Luke 2:39). They did not have a take it or leave it attitude toward God. Joseph and Mary were committed to the Lord. They took their relationship with God seriously. According to Jewish tradition, Mary taught Him Scripture from the time He could speak a sentence, memorizing great portions of it. In his teens Joseph taught Him a trade and they continued to memorize God's Word and grow in wisdom.

### ***The normal maturation process (v. 40)***

"And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (v. 40). A. T. Robertson reminds us He was "a hearty vigorous little boy." He was full of life. He was like any other four-year-old! Jesus was not a harried child, rushed through childhood years. He was allowed to

develop as a child at His own natural normal pace. Jesus was normal. He continued to be filled with wisdom. It was a process of continued action. Nothing was abnormal about Him. You could not write an abnormal psychology textbook based on His life. He was perfectly normal. He sets the standard for normality. Mary and Joseph modeled wisdom from God's Word. They modeled before Him the application of Biblical wisdom in daily life. He continued to increase in wisdom as He grew older.

A. T. Robertson writes, "The process of filling with wisdom kept pace with the bodily growth. If it were only always true with others! We need not be troubled over this growth in wisdom on the part of Jesus any more than over his bodily growth." He quotes Plummer, "The intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth of the Child, like the physical, was real. His was a perfect humanity developing perfectly, unimpeded by hereditary or acquired defects. It was the first instance of such a growth in history. For the first time a human infant was realizing the ideal of humanity."

Let the spiritual growth of your children be a natural process. Don't rush it, but don't be insensitive to it. Take seriously your responsibility as a parent. Be sensitive to God's leading in your child's life.

I thank God for a mother who was sensitive to spiritual things in my life. When I was twelve years old, the church where we attended had a summer revival. A large number of teenagers made public their faith in Christ as their personal Savior. I didn't that Sunday morning. When I got home after church I asked my mother "if I could join the church." She was very perceptive and replied, this is a serious matter and we will talk about it this week and we will sit down with the pastor and discuss it with him, also. During the week my mother stressed that joining the church and being baptized had nothing to do with becoming a Christian. My need was far greater. I needed to put my faith in Jesus as my personal Savior. I needed to believe on Him as my Savior understanding that He died for my sins and rose from the dead. She was sensitive to what God was doing in my life. She had been praying daily for months for her Sunday School class that included all of the boys and girls who had made decisions that week! She led me to faith in Christ. How eternally grateful I am to her for her spiritual sensitivity to what God was doing in my life. When we buried my mother at 91, there were many who came to her visitation and expressed repeatedly how she was the one responsible for their coming to Christ. Be sensitive to the spiritual needs of your children. Take time to share Christ with them.

We have three grown daughters and my wife is an excellent example of a mother who was sensitive to the Holy Spirit's dealings with them. Make sure you have a right relationship with God first. If you as a parent are not right with God you cannot walk in the Spirit and abide in Christ. You will evade, put off, run away from spiritual things in your children's life if you are not right with God, and your child's blood will be on our hands. Be spiritually prepared and sensitive to witness to your children. Share Christ with them. Don't be afraid or ashamed to talk about spiritual things with them.

### ***Jesus as a teenager in the home (v. 51-52)***

Jesus was submissive to His parents. "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (v. 51). He was an obedient teen. "He continued in subjection to them." The word denotes "habitual, continuous subjection" to His parents. It was His habit or custom to be obedient to His parents. He was not a rebellious child. The word "subjection" is a military term meaning, "to fall in rank under the authority of another." Jesus walked with His parents under their authority. He submitted to their authority. The Son of God was the perfect son of His human parents. What a role model for us today. He learned obedience at the table of His earthly parents (Hebrews 5:8-9). What an attitude for teens to model. He was the perfect child with imperfect parents; the King and they His subjects, and "He continued in subjection to them." Just like us, Mary and Joseph were imperfect and limited, yet He treated them with respect. Robertson writes, "He continued subject unto them, this wondrous boy who really knew more than parents and rabbis, this gentle, obedient, affectionate boy. The next eighteen years at Nazareth (Luke

3:23) he remained growing into manhood and becoming the carpenter of Nazareth (Mark 6:3) in succession to Joseph (Matt. 13:55) who is mentioned here for the last time."

Jesus was balanced. "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (v. 52). His development was not one sided. He was not so spiritual that He was of no earthly good. He lived in harmony with God and men. Verse 52 reveals His development from age 12-30. There was normal maturation of His physical, mental emotional and spiritual wellbeing. There was normal vigorous growth. He grew "in favor with God and men" means they loved Him and enjoyed being around Him. He was a favorite with men, and He is the most attractive personality the world has ever known.

The physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual development of Jesus was perfect. "At each stage He was perfect for that stage."

## **PERSONAL APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY**

False pagan deities are always ready to invade your home. The gods of humanism, new age movements, the cults, materialism, fame, fortune, popularity, power, greed, immorality, drugs, etc. are always vying for our attention. How do you live the Christian life in such a pagan world? God asks us to place our hand in His and walk with Him by faith. He will never let go. We find our security in Him alone.

We live in a day when there are quacks and cults all over the place, so let me stress clearly God never asks parents to do something that will harm their children physically, emotionally, morally or spiritually. You be a winsome witness for Christ in your home.

***When we love the Lord your God with all our being we make Him the center of our home life.***

It is easy to bring the Lord into the picture if He is the center of your life. You cannot help but talk about the one you love. Let that love for Him make lasting influences in your home. Get eternity into the picture and it will change your home. As a family make a commitment now to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We cannot train our children to love the Lord if we do not first love Him.

***When you teach from your lifestyle you teach from your whole person and you sharpen your children to face a pagan culture.***

Your life is an open book read by everyone in your family. What are they reading, dad? What are they listen to, mom?

***When you are sensitive to the spiritual life of your child you will see the fruit of your love for Christ.***

Don't be ashamed to share Christ with your family. Be sensitive to God's work in their lives and seize the teaching moment.

***If you are a teen, please be patient with your parents! God is still working on us.***

I have always thought it was strange but we are never ready to be parents until after our children have left the nest. Jesus must have been extremely patient with Mary and Joseph. He submitted to their authority. He had His priorities straight. Jesus lived in harmony with God and His parents.

May the Lord help us to live Christ in a pagan society, and may our homes honor and glorify His name.

Here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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