



## CHAPTER III

### HISTORICAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: THE CHRISTIAN VOICE ON SUCCESS, MARRIAGE-FAMILY LIFE AND MASCULINITY

#### 3.1 Reflections on Biblical Texts<sup>1</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Joshua 1:1-9

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:

2 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them - to the Israelites.

3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates - all the Hittite country - to the Great Sea on the west.

5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.'

Joshua was the one to complete Moses' unfinished task in leading Israel into the promised land. He had earlier been chosen to be Moses' successor in Dt 31:7-8. And all leadership in Israel was to stand in the shadow of Moses in that it had to fulfil the command first given to Moses to possess the land for Israel (Butler 1983:13).

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical texts are cited in the New International Version. The first two passages are used to reflect on success, the next two on marriage-family life and the last two on masculinity.

After some forty long years in the wilderness, Joshua's big day had arrived - he was to lead God's people into the promised land of Canaan. Only the Jordan River stood between them and this great promise of God. For Joshua, what a pleasure it would be to cross this divide and to claim this great promise of God. Yet at the same time, what a pressure it must be to take over from an esteemed predecessor and to face the uncertainties ahead. Hence, the words of God came to Joshua as divine consolation in that His presence would guarantee the fulfilment of His command, and act as the basis of Joshua's courage and certainty (Butler 1983:14).

Joshua was Moses' aide.<sup>2</sup> He was Moses' minister in that he rendered personal service to the senior leader (Woudstra 1981:57). He was Moses' right-hand man; a confidant with whom Moses would share his personal thoughts and feelings. On the other side of the relationship, Moses was like a father figure and mentor to Joshua. Naturally, the death of Moses was a time of both grief and anxiety for Joshua. But God chose this time to call Joshua to lead Israel into action; to arise and cross the Jordan; to claim the land He had promised Israel. He said to Joshua: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to go into Canaan.' With this call, Joshua was to officially take over from Moses. But Moses had been highly regarded as a great leader by the people. For Joshua, getting into Canaan was very much a test of performance - could he perform as well as his great predecessor Moses? For the people of Israel, the march into Canaan was very much a measure of performance - could their new leader perform to their expectations?<sup>3</sup>

In view of his concern, God's words in vv 2-5 must be very reassuring to Joshua. The repeated use of 'I' by God emphasises Him as the real driving force behind the whole

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<sup>2</sup> Moses was given the title 'servant of the LORD'. But this was not bestowed on Joshua until the end of the book in 24:29.

<sup>3</sup> It was likely that Joshua was intimidated by the greatness of Moses and the awesomeness of his new responsibility (Madvig 1992:256).

Canaanite campaign: 'I am about to give ....' (v 2); 'I will give ... I promised ....' (v 3); 'I was with Moses ... I will be with you ... I will never leave you nor forsake you' (v 5). All these served to reassure Joshua of God's covenantal faithfulness and presence with him. It was as if God was telling him: 'Joshua, how well you perform is not in terms of how close you measure up to Moses, but how close you follow me as your leader. You have been chosen to succeed Moses, but you are not chosen to succeed me. Let me lead you as you perform the work I have for you. I am the covenantal God, true and faithful to what I have purposed for and through you.' In the face of the pressure to perform, Joshua was reminded to do his best in trusting God as the leader of what he was about to do. As Woudstra (1981:61) has commented, when God said, 'I will not leave you nor forsake you,' He made His unfailing presence and aid as the guarantee of Joshua's success.

The pressure to perform is very real in today's success-oriented world. It can be the pressure to perform as well as another person, or the pressure to perform to people's expectations. When a person does his best but still fails to compare favourably with someone else, or to win the applause of others, he may see himself as a person of lesser achievement. He may feel insecure about who he is and what he is doing. He may feel like a failure.

The Christian is to be and to do his best with all the opportunities that God has given him. But at end of the day, when he finds himself not a Moses, or when people are harder to please than God, he needs to ask himself two questions: 'Is God pleased with what I have become, never mind if I am not a Moses?' 'Is God pleased with what I have done, never mind if others hardly applaud me along the way?' A 'yes' to these questions should be reason enough to rejoice because it is indicative that he has let God be the leader of his being and doing. In his desire to perform well, the Christian is to let God be the leader and master of all

that he wants to be and to do. His divine presence and aid is still the guarantee of every Christian's success.

God commanded Joshua three times to 'be strong and courageous' (vv 6, 7 and 9). To be strong is to hold fast and to be courageous is to have a resolute mind.<sup>4</sup> This command was also a warning that all would not be easy in Canaan. There would not only be many opportunities in Canaan, but also many distractions to tempt Joshua and the people away from all that God had purposed for them. Canaan provided Joshua not only the pressure to perform, but also the pressure to stray away from God. Hence, he was commanded to 'be strong and courageous' in the face of all the distractions; to hold fast to his faith in God and to have a resolute mind bent toward God all the time. God was here commanding Joshua to be always with Him just as He had promised to be always with His man. Joshua was called to obey all the law, to speak it, to meditate on it without deviating from it in any way (vv 7-8). He was to let God's law be so much in him that he lived it, followed it, talked about it, and even slept with it on his mind. The emphasis was that mere knowledge of God's law was not enough. One must also 'be careful to do everything written in it' (v 8). The law was to control all of Joshua's thoughts and actions, and he was commanded to obey all of it. Obedience to certain parts of it was really no obedience at all (Madvig 1992:257). The promised reward for this total obedience to God's law was that Joshua would be 'prosperous and successful' (v 8). Commenting on this, Woudstra (1981:63) says that living a life in fellowship with God by observing His law would bring 'happy achievement of life's goal and prosperity' for Joshua and the people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson, William 1978. s v 'Strong, Strength, Strengthen' and 'Courage'. *Old Testament Word Studies*.

<sup>5</sup> Woudstra (1981:55) has translated 'be prosperous' and 'be successful' in v 8 as 'happily achieve your goal' and 'prosper' respectively. Though there is a direct connection between law observance and prosperity here, this must not be seen as an automatic link as evident in Job and Ps 73. In a religio-ethical sense, to prosper is to seek God and to let oneself be guided by Him (Woudstra 1981:63).

Canaan was a land of abundance and opportunities. It was also a land of great distractions. In the light of this reality, Joshua and the people were not to run wild and free, but to firmly and resolutely let God's law be their reference point. In fact, God not only wanted them to enjoy Canaan as His promised blessing, but also to glorify Him there. Hence, the law was given in anticipation of their entry into Canaan.<sup>6</sup> It was to be their reference point from where they would draw their direction and guidance so that when they eventually entered Canaan, they would not live like godless people but as God's people. This means that the prosperity and success mentioned in v 8 must not be understood only in material terms, but also in spiritual and moral terms. Canaan was where the Israelites must fight militarily to possess the land - that's the material aspect. It was also where they must fight spiritually so that they would continue to worship the true God and not the Canaanite idols. And Canaan was where they must fight morally as well so that they would continue to follow the holy law of God, not the decadent rules of the Canaanites. In short, Canaan was pressure to stray away for the Israelites because their integrity as God's people would be severely tested materially, spiritually and morally. They would have to fight on all these three fronts by sticking firmly and resolutely to God's law and way. That's the key to their complete victory, prosperity and success. And just as it was in the ancient world, a person's victory, prosperity and success today are often measured by the possessions he has. Walter Brueggemann (1994:276-77) calls this the 'royal/urban' view of property. He says:

This view affirmed that 'haves' are entitled to have, whether the haves are the king, the nobles, the wealthy landowners, or the managers of legitimated bureaucracy ... haves may have and legitimately seek more. The right of the have-nots - citizens, peasants, slaves, all the powerless ones - is nil.

The Bible articulates an alternative view of property that is not exclusive to the Bible but receives its most compelling statement there. It may be designated 'covenantal/prophetic'. It holds that the haves and the have-nots are bound in

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<sup>6</sup> Brueggemann (1977:61) asserts that the law is given not to coerce or control the people of Israel. Rather, it is for the purpose of helping them to always remember their 'historicality with Yahweh and with land.'



community to each other, that viable life depends upon the legitimate respect, care, and maintenance of the have-nots and upon restraint of the haves so that the needs and rights of the disadvantaged take priority over the yearnings of the advantaged.

Hence, in giving the land to Israel, God had intended that they would not exercise power to control one another, but responsibility to be compassionate toward one another as spelt out in the 'social laws' of Israel, especially that of the Jubilee.

Brueggemann (1977:53) further points out that entering into Canaan is not entry 'into safe space but into a context of covenant.' But the land has within it seductive power - 'it invites Israel to enter life apart from covenant.' While camping at the Jordan, the main resource which Israel seems to have in resisting this temptation is that of memory. Indeed, Israel's greatest temptation is to forget and disregard the Lord's covenantal faithfulness as they moved from being slaves to being land-owners.

Another seduction of the land is to lure the people of Israel to view themselves 'no longer recipient of the land, but as controller, no longer creature of grace but manager of achievement' (Brueggemann 1977:56). In other words, the people are tempted to worship themselves as gods of their own sufficiency. Against this danger, Brueggemann (1977:57) speaks: 'Yahweh is the Lord of *gifted existence*, taken freely and without merit. And the way to sustain gifted existence is to stay singularly with the gift-giver.'

The world today is like Canaan in Joshua's time with all its abundance and opportunities for a good life. But these opportunities can also lure Christians to stray away from God. Hence, they must view these not only as blessings, but also as responsibilities to glorify God. To do so, the same key instruction applies - be strong and courageous in a world of material seductions; hold fast to the rules of God with a resolute mind. And whenever Christians think that some of God's rules do not apply as they exploit the abundance and opportunities before them, it is a warning that they may be straying away from God's way.

When God and His rules are only relevant to a small part of life but not all of life, Christians end up believing in a big 'I' but a small God.

The integrity of Christians is also very much tested in their own 'Canaan'. They are exposed to norms, values and practices that are contrary to God's rules for living. All these pressure them to be open to other alternatives, thereby making God as merely a preferred choice rather than an absolute. God then has many competitors as far as authority over their lives is concerned. If Christians are not careful, they fall into the temptation of living according to the rules of the 'Canaanite' world, not according to the rules of God. Just as it was in Joshua's time, so it is today - Christians are not to be succumbed but to 'engage the Canaanites so that the management objectives for the land can be radically transformed.' While the notion of success today is very much about 'winning and conquering land,' the Bible clearly instructs that 'to trust is to believe land is faithfully given' (Brueggemann 1977:70). Indeed, controlling and organising this gift well is only man's faithful response to the Lord's faithfulness.

But success is not to be understood only as doing well in material terms. Understanding it in a total sense would include the spiritual and moral dimensions as well. To be prosperous and successful in the biblical sense is the result of one seeking God and letting Him be the guide. It is both a responsibility and a blessing in that as God's people seek to act with godly wisdom, they achieve the goals that God has for them materially, spiritually and morally. Only then do they avoid making God a means to their self-fulfilment. They do not make God exist to serve them, but they make themselves exist to serve Him. Indeed, success is not just the attainment of material blessings, but also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in a world of abundance and opportunities. It is not straying away from God, but sticking with Him as one's leader and authority in life.



### 3.1.2 Luke 10:38-42

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

41 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things,

42 But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

In v 39, Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said.' Picture Jesus sitting down with His disciples around Him in the house of Martha and Mary. He had some things heavy on His heart and He was about to teach these to His disciples. Along came Mary and she also sat at the Lord's feet, listening to all that He was teaching. She was not asked to leave the group. The Lord accepted her participation. He did not tell her, 'Excuse me, woman, this is purely for men.'

Malina and Neyrey believe that this story really upsets the perception of how things ought to be then. The social practice at that time would expect 'clear patterns of space that are appropriate to men and to women, patterns which replicate the understanding of male honour and female shame.' In the story, to her shame, Mary had stepped into male space and acted like a man! Thus, Malina and Neyrey (1991:62) remark:

The expected place of Mary ... is with Martha in the women's part of that household, the kitchen; she is not expected in the dining area, and so her presence there requires a special explanation. Jesus' remark to Martha serves to vindicate Mary's exceptional presence in space not expected of her ....

Hence, if one understands the position of women in Jewish society at that time, one will realise that the Lord had done something very revolutionary indeed. Women kept a low profile in religious gatherings. In fact, no women would be allowed to sit and learn at the feet

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<sup>7</sup> In first-century Judaism, it is highly unusual for a woman to be accepted by a teacher as a disciple (Liefeld 1984:944).



honour the Lord. In contrast to Mary who listened to what Jesus wanted to say, Martha ended up telling Him what He must say (Nolland 1993:604).

An affluent culture today generally believes that good things do not come free, and free things do not come good. As such, people need to appreciate afresh the free grace of God. For Christians, their significance rests in God's grace, and they are already significant before Him because of who they are in Jesus Christ. The sad thing is that many are still searching for significance in their own way and strength. They look to performance, possession and position for their sense of significance. But the truth is that they are already significant before God because of the finished work of Christ on the Cross. Nothing else needs to be added to what God has already done for them in Christ. They are to find their significance in God's grace.

The danger of trying to produce self-significance is that Christians can end up like Martha. The more they try, the more they become discontented like her. Discontentment undermines the grace of God because it makes people unappreciative of what He has blessed them with. It makes them feel that God has somehow shortchanged them; that God has not given enough to them; that they have to try and top up what is lacking in their own strength. Indeed, the danger of discontentment is that people try to find self-significance in their performance, possession and position rather than in His grace. God's people can forget that He will still accept them in spite of their failures to secure results and recognition in a pragmatic world. As far as God is concerned, they truly experience success when they find their significance and sufficiency ultimately in His divine grace, not in their human greatness.

In vv 41-42, the Lord told Martha, 'You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.'<sup>8</sup> Picture the disappointment on Martha's face when she heard those

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<sup>8</sup> Some manuscripts render v 42 this way: 'but few things are needed - or only one.' This verse is traditionally understood as Jesus suggesting then that a simple meal was good enough for Him (Nolland 1993:604).



words. She was trying to honour the Lord with so many things, but somehow, still failed to please Him. What a waste of effort!

Are Christians not also as vulnerable as Martha? In all the things they busy themselves with today, is not the obsession with doing things a real temptation? Are not the unceasing movements in life directing their devotion away from the Lord to the self as they seek to advance their own significance?

While Martha received a gentle rebuke, Mary was praised for having chosen 'what is better' (v 42).<sup>9</sup> She had chosen to be still before the Lord than to be busy. She knew that too much doing at this time would undermine her devotion to the Lord - she would not be able to give Him the necessary attention or to follow His schedule for her. She matched her action (or inaction) according to the Lord's values and priorities for her, resulting in her minimising what was humanly important and maximising what was important to the Lord. On the other hand, Martha's devotion was not based on this perception of values and priorities. Consequently, she ended up maximising her toil in the kitchen and minimising her time with the Lord (Gooding 1987:216). She was the loser here not because she desired to work hard or to do her best. She lost out because, unlike Mary, she failed to understand the Lord's values and priorities for her.

One's busyness can relegate his/her walk with the Lord from a relationship to a ritual; from a vital devotion to a meaningless motion. Christians need to guard their devotion to the Lord lest they are lured into finding their significance in frenzied motions. But finding their significance in their devotion to the Lord's values and priorities for them can be costly. They may be made to look like an oddball. They may have to pause and examine prevailing trends,

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<sup>9</sup> There is no explanation of 'what is better' (literally, it is translated 'the good part'). Some have understood this to be the contemplative life or putting worship before service (Liefeld 1984:945). Howard Marshall (1978:454) interprets 'what is better' as 'the teaching of Jesus, or perhaps the blessings of the kingdom to which it testified,' and which is Mary's 'inalienable right and possession, guaranteed by Jesus.' However, this writer would take it to mean devotion to the Lord *according to God's values and priorities*. Hence, Mary's sitting at the Lord's feet was 'better' than Martha's cooking in the kitchen though both were devoted to pleasing Him on this occasion.

and then have the audacity to say: 'This pursuit is not of right value and priority in the Lord's sight. In His name, I must stop it.' Such a response can be costly because one may lose out in significant ways when compared with others. But if one is to treasure his/her relationship with the Lord, this may be the 'only one thing' he/she must do.

The story of Martha and Mary is an account of what it means to follow the Lord. It is not by way of rushing into noisy actions, but by way of giving quiet attention to Him, and exercising His values and priorities in daily living. This story warns that today's busyness can tempt Christians to seek self-significance rather than the Lord's pre-eminence in their relationship with Him.

Life's affairs will not sort themselves out automatically into a true order of priorities. God's people are to deliberately choose those necessities that are in accordance to the Lord's values and priorities for them. The Lord does not fault them for working hard and putting in their best effort but for having a wrong order of values and priorities. The right choices guard their time and energies from being tyrannised by pursuits that make them busy, but not in accordance to the Lord's values and priorities for them (Gooding 1987:216). And such choices may mean slowing down in life so that people can find true and lasting success because, like Mary, they have 'chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away ....'

### 3.1.3 Genesis 2:18-23

18 The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'

This text speaks of the institution of marriage by God. He was the officiating minister at that very first wedding where He brought the first couple together. In all that God did and said, culminating in the coming together of Adam and Eve, one sees God's intent in the institution of marriage, which is for a man and his wife to make a commitment toward companionship and completeness in each other. How then does God want a couple to live out this commitment in their marriage?

In v 18, God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'<sup>10</sup> In a larger sense, this verse speaks of God's intent for a person to experience community with others and not isolation from them. But in the context of the first man Adam, this verse has a narrower meaning.<sup>11</sup> It means that God's specific intent is for Adam to experience community with a 'helper suitable for him.' The Lord saw something lacking in the life of Adam - he was alone and needed companionship with a 'suitable helper' in order to be a complete person.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to read of God bringing a 'zoological parade' before Adam in v 19. 'All the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air' were brought before Adam, and he was to name them one by one.<sup>13</sup> Such an act of naming the animals is evident of the fact that Adam was given authority over them as God's representative. Even more importantly, as he was

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<sup>10</sup> God's 'not good' in this verse is in sharp contrast to His earlier affirmation of all of creation. Leupold (1942:129) has noted that the creation of Adam and Eve falls within the sixth day of creation, and thus, the 'very good' in Gn 1:31 should come after the 'not good' in Gn 2:18 chronologically. In other words, God declared His creation as 'very good' in 1:31 only after He had corrected the 'not good' in 2:18.

<sup>11</sup> Depending on the context, the Hebrew word for 'man' can be translated as 'the [first] man' (referring to Adam) or generically as 'mankind'.

<sup>12</sup> This does not imply that marriage is a must for everyone. In 1 Cor 7, Paul points out that remaining single is both a calling and gift from God. However, it is God's intent that every person has at least a significant other in life with whom a deep and meaningful relationship is shared.

<sup>13</sup> It is unlikely that all species of creatures were brought before Adam and named by him (Leupold 1942:131).

naming the animals, Adam was made to realise his lack and he became aware of his own solitude (Ross 1988:126).

Adam became aware of his lack when he reviewed the animals and found no 'suitable helper' for himself (v 20).<sup>14</sup> The word 'helper' is not a demeaning term as it essentially describes one who provides what is lacking in the other (Ross 1988:126). Hence, in looking for a 'suitable helper', Adam was seeking for someone who would be worthy enough to help him do what he could not do alone - to complement him and not to compete with him. This 'suitable helper' would fill up the lack in Adam's life and make it complete. And as Adam named the animals one by one, he came to realise to his dismay that no animal could be a 'suitable helper' for him. He realised that he needed a person and not a pet. He realised that to experience true companionship and completeness, he needed someone whom he could relate meaningfully, person to person. Adam found that he could not do this with any of the animals, and Eve came as a gift from God to fill up this lack in his life.

In the same way, married couples today need to treasure each other as God's good gift for each other. They should treasure each other dearly because God has brought them together in His own good time to make each other's life complete and sufficient. Just as no beast or bird could take the place of Eve in Adam's life, couples are to so treasure each other and not to go for poor substitutes. The real danger today is for couples to treasure possessions as more important than each other; to regard things as good substitutes for relationships. Though very few would actually rob a bank, many have been tempted to rob time from some significant relationships in their lives in order to possess some much desired things. Thus, people can become poorer relationally even though they may be richer materially. Couples do

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<sup>14</sup> John Sailhamer (1990:46) is of the opinion that the 'help' envisioned here is tied to the bearing of children. The implication here is that the review of the animals by Adam was an attempt to find one with which he could mate and produce offsprings. This interpretation is not only offending, but also incorrectly ignores the broader meaning of 'help' intended here.

well to view Adam's experience as God's corrective for today. In spite of the many options presented in the animals, Eve was Adam's best option for filling his lack in life because she came as God's gift for him. In the same way, one is to treasure his/her spouse as God's gift - not as someone you have to live with because there are no other options, but as someone you cannot live without because he/she is God's good gift.

In vv 21-22, one sees how God fashioned Eve from a rib taken from Adam's side. The Lord put a deep sleep over Adam and then performed a divine surgery.<sup>15</sup> When the man awoke, God brought the woman to him.

Adam declared in v 23: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.'

Gerhard Von Rad (1972:84) describes the 'first wedding' this way:

Now God himself, like a father of the bride, leads the woman to the man. The man in supreme joy at once recognises the new creature as one belonging completely to him, and he expresses his understanding immediately in the proper name that he gives the new creature.<sup>16</sup>

Adam had finally found the 'suitable helper' he was looking for in the person of Eve. In fact, neither would be complete without the other. Without Adam's rib, there would be no completion in the making of Eve. Without Eve, there would be no completeness in the life of Adam. Such is the nature of their complementary partnership.<sup>17</sup> Also, Adam's words in v 23

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<sup>15</sup> Claus Westermann (1987:21) is of the opinion that 'the creation of the woman from one of the man's ribs is not intended to be a factual description.' Rather, it is only a depiction to 'ground the intimate relationship between man and woman in the process of creation itself.'

<sup>16</sup> In the naming of the animals in Gn 2:20, the emphasis is not on use of words but on inner appropriation by recognition, thereby intellectually objectifying each animal. However, when man names woman in Gn 2:23, it is the verbal expression of that inner appropriation (Von Rad 1972:83).

<sup>17</sup> Ross (1988:126) points out that to call Eve a 'suitable helper' for Adam is to imply that she is his counterpart in that they correspond physically, socially and spiritually. She would be his fitting complement in view of her relative difference but essential equality with him. In practical terms today, this means that a man lives with his wife by his presence and participation at home; that a man knows his wife by being sensitive and communicative toward her; that a man honours his wife by his appreciation and esteem of her.

Westermann (1987:21) understands 'helper' in its broadest sense - not only in work and procreation, but also in all aspects of human existence. Eve suits Adam in that there is 'mutual self-understanding in conversation, in silence, in openness to one another.'



testify to the dignity of the woman - she is not of inferior substance, but of 'bones and flesh' like Adam. She is taken neither from Adam's head nor foot. Hence, she is neither superior nor inferior to Adam. But she comes from Adam's rib taken from his side so that she is 'exactly on the same level with him as far as being a creature of God is concerned' (Leupold 1942:135).<sup>18</sup>

God intends man and wife to live side by side as partners in life. They are to work out all differences and conflicts together as counterparts on the same side, not as competitors on different sides. As counterparts in life, man and wife are not to walk behind each other for there is nothing to hide from each other; they are not to walk ahead of each other for there is nothing to run away from each other. But they are to walk beside each other because they are to stand by each other 'as long as they both shall live.' Westermann (1987:21) declares that the relationship between man and woman as portrayed in Gn 2 is to be a 'lifelong association that comprises all facets of life; it includes maturity and old age, and lasts until death.'

It is appropriate to mention at this point that the theology of marriage has gone through many redefinitions over the years. For example, John Calvin's early theology of marriage was grounded in the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms - the heavenly and the earthly. He had argued that marriage was only relevant to the earthly kingdom. Christians should be a part of it, not for salvation or sanctification, but for protection against lust. However, in later years, Calvin shifted his stand and grounded his theology of marriage in the doctrine of covenant. He used this doctrine not only to depict the relationship between God and man, but also that between husband and wife. Since God is the one who brings man and woman together in covenantal relationship, He expects faithfulness and sacrifices in keeping that relationship (Witte 1997:94-95).

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<sup>18</sup> Wenham (1987:70) argues that the fact that Adam named Eve 'indicates that she is expected to be subordinated to him' though they are equal in nature.



Calvin asserted that the only ground for divorce was adultery. Should the marriage be dissolved on the ground of adultery, he urged that both parties be given the liberty to remarry (Witte 1997:101).

Calvin also forbade the 'separation from bed and board' in the marital relationship. He said: 'A married man is only half a person, and he can no more separate himself from his wife than cut himself into two pieces.' In the case of a protracted separation, Calvin preferred to end the marriage on the ground of presumed adultery by one party (Witte 1997:103).

Calvin also claimed that marriage had three purposes - for mutual love, for mutual procreation, and for mutual protection from lust. Hence, he considered sexual dysfunction as one reason for nullifying a marriage (Witte 1997:105).

Unlike Calvin, Christian thinkers in the 1700s (Enlightenment Period) began to perceive marriage as contractual rather than covenantal. They (Witte 1997:196-97) argued:

The essence of marriage was the voluntary bargain struck between the two parties. The terms of their marital bargain were not preset by God or nature, church or state, tradition or community. These terms were set by the parties themselves, in accordance with general rules of contract formation and general norms of civil society.

It is evident here that these Enlightenment thinkers viewed God and the church as unnecessary in the establishment of a marital relationship between a man and a woman. This understanding was rooted in a new theology emerging during that period - that of deism, individualism and rationalism. In fact, this model has actually spurred the twentieth-century revolution of Western marriage law (Witte 1997:197-98).

Today, many couples are willing to spend much time, effort and resources to have a grand wedding, yet can be so unwilling to do the same to ensure a great marriage. Perhaps, some view the wedding as only a one-time event and they do not have to commit themselves to work at it for life. Others, on the other hand, are less motivated to work on their marriage

because they realise it is something for the long haul. They have to work hard on it yet the results are often not instant. In a highly pragmatic world when results are slow in coming, the temptation is to stop trying and to look for other options.

When God first instituted marriage in Gn 2:18-23, He did not bring man and woman together just for a one-time event in a wedding ceremony, but for a life-long commitment in marriage. And they are to honour this life-long commitment by treasuring their spouse as a gift from God and treating each other as partners in life together.

#### 3.1.4 Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 'Honour your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise -

3 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

In this text, Paul addresses the family and he begins with the children.<sup>19</sup> He says in v 1: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.' Hence, Paul declares at the very outset that a properly functioning family is the training ground for the proper respect of authority. Children are to learn at home that certain lines must be drawn, certain expectations must be met, and certain people must be respected and obeyed.

The word 'obey' (*hupakouo*) in Greek is actually a composite of two words - 'under' (*hupo*) and 'hear' (*akouo*). Thus, 'to obey' literally means 'to under hear'. This implies that one cannot really obey unless he submits himself to what he is hearing. Obedience carries with it the idea of hearing with the intent to carry out what has been said.

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<sup>19</sup> More specifically, Paul is here speaking to children who are still dependent on their parents for guidance and provision in life. O'Brien (1999:440-41) suggests that 'children' here primarily stresses relationship rather than age. The text probably has in view young children who are learning and growing up. However, adult children could even be included here since, in those days, paternal authority in the family would only cease at the time of the father's death.



Paul also stresses that it is 'right' for children to obey their parents. This does not mean that such obedience is merely fitting or suitable. Rather, it is an actual duty to be carried out, implying that children need to recognise that some things have to be accepted even if they do not fully understand them at the time (Wood 1978:81). Such obedience should not only flow from the feeling of love, gratitude and esteem for one's parents. More importantly, it should flow from one's reverence for the Lord. It is 'right' in that when a child so obeys his parents, he so pleases the Lord. Such obedience to parents is 'right' because it keeps the child in right relationship with the Father in heaven.<sup>20</sup>

However, Paul does make an important qualification here - that such an obedience is to be 'in the Lord'. It is not to be some kind of blind or absolute obedience whereby one obeys against Scripture and the Christian conscience. To obey 'in the Lord' is to obey in those things that are consistent with Christ and Scripture. Leon Morris (1994:190) adds that the Christian child of non-Christian parents should obey them as long as the Christian faith is not opposed or harmed. Otherwise, the child is to obey Christ rather than parents so that their obedience will still be 'in the Lord'. However, even this refusal to obey one's parents should be done in a spirit of love, not of defiance or rebellion.<sup>21</sup>

One common problem faced by many young Christians in Singapore is the objection by their non-Christian parents to their baptism. The reason is that these parents view baptism as a kind of initiation rite that totally cuts them off from their children.<sup>22</sup> But some of these young Christians have insisted on getting baptised, resulting in much conflict with their parents.

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<sup>20</sup> O'Brien (1999:442) suggests that such an obedience is 'right' because it is in conformity to the Old Testament commandment which follows in vv 2-3. In other words, such an obedience is not merely good, but more importantly, godly in essence.

<sup>21</sup> This is good advice for young Christians in Singapore as many of them have non-Christian parents. These young believers are commonly called 'first-generation Christians'.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps, these parents see baptism as something like the Buddhist practice of shaving off one's hair when one enters monkhood. The shaving of hair is an initiation rite which marks the separation of one's world from that of one's family.

Applying Paul's teaching on obedience 'in the Lord', young Christians in Singapore will do well to note that while desiring to be baptised is good, it is sometimes best to delay it because of certain family situations. After all, Scripture does not command a precise time for one to be baptised. However, if the parents demand that Jesus Christ be denied and renounced, the child must not give in and comply.

In vv 2-3, Paul cites the fifth of the Ten Commandments. To honour in v 2 is more than just to obey. It is to respect and esteem; 'the form love assumes towards those who are placed above us by God' (Wood 1978:81).<sup>23</sup> For children, they do well to remember that though they may outgrow the obligation to obey their parents when they become adults, they will never outgrow the call to honour them.<sup>24</sup> Even as grown-up people, children are called not to forget and neglect their parents.

There is some uncertainty as to what Paul means by describing this call as 'the first commandment with a promise.'<sup>25</sup> It is best to understand Paul as asserting this call to be 'the first commandment' not in terms of being the first to be mentioned, but in terms of being one of foremost significance (Wood 1978:81).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the foremost significance of this commandment can be better appreciated from an opposite perspective by considering the effects of dishonouring one's parents. These are often related to an undisciplined and rebellious lifestyle of waste and vice.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A Skevington Wood comments on this verse and is here quoting Lenski.

<sup>24</sup> Like the king of a nation, the father could not be dishonoured by his family members in the first-century Mediterranean world. He was above criticism in that the family member who disobeyed him would only stain himself/herself (Malina 1981:42).

<sup>25</sup> The problem here is that this fifth commandment does not appear to be the first of the ten with a promise attached. The second commandment in Ex 20:4-6 seems to carry a promise too, but Morris (1994:191) says that it is a statement of what God will do rather than a promise.

<sup>26</sup> The rabbis had regarded this commandment as the most weighty of all. In the original Greek, the absence of the article before *protos* ('first') supports the idea that this commandment is 'one of first importance' rather than 'the first in sequence.' Morris (1994:191) points out another possible understanding of what is meant here - 'For children this is the first commandment to be learned ...'

<sup>27</sup> In OT times, a stubborn and rebellious son would face the wrath of the law and be stoned to death (Dt 21:18-21).



The foremost significance in this commandment can also be seen in the promise in v 3 - 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'<sup>28</sup> Francis Foulkes has suggested that it would be wise not to interpret this promise in an individualistic and literal sense. He comments:

It is not necessary to take the promise in an individualistic sense, or as a literal promise of longevity. Although the singular pronoun was used in the original, it is doubtful if the spiritually minded, even in the Old Testament days, regarded its greatest significance as a personal promise for those who showed filial piety. Then, as in any generation, it could be seen that the strength of family life, and the training of children to habits of order and obedience, were the means and the marks of the stability of a community or nation. When the bonds of family life break up, when respect for parents fails, the community becomes decadent and will not live long (Foulkes 1980:65).

Hence, the thrust in vv 1-3 is directed at bringing across this one important point: disobedience to parents is a mark of social disintegration, and Christian families must act to prevent the collapse of order in their society (Wood 1978:80).

Having admonished the children, Paul turns to the parents in v 4 with these words: 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.'<sup>29</sup> To be parents worthy of obedience and honour, Paul first admonishes them not to 'exasperate' (*parorgizo*) their children.<sup>30</sup> To exasperate here is to provoke to anger or to induce resentment. Parents are not to provoke their children into a perpetual state of anger or resentment. As an act of concern for their children's well-being, parents are to carefully consider how their words and actions will affect the young.

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<sup>28</sup> In citing this OT reference, Paul replaces 'that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you' in Ex 20:12 to 'that you may enjoy long life on the earth' in Eph 6:3. The land in the original OT reference is that which God has promised Israel. Since Paul is speaking to Christians and not to Jews in Eph 6:3, he changes the wording so that a 'specific assurance to the Jews becomes a generalisation for Christians' (Wood 1978:81).

<sup>29</sup> Paul calls on fathers here as they are the heads of their families. But it is likely that he directs what he has to say to mothers as well.

<sup>30</sup> This apostolic injunction was revolutionary in the first century because a father then had absolute authority over his family members (Morris 1994:192). The stress here is not on exercising paternal authority, but on respecting the dignity of children by not using excessive harshness in fatherly control. Children are not merely things over whom the father has legal rights, but they are really human beings with their own rights (Lincoln 1990:409).

In today's society, there are a number of ways in which parents can exasperate their children:

- *Fault-finding*: This causes the child to lose heart because the parent never seems to be happy with what he/she has done. Careless and biting words from the parent can easily crush the child's spirit.

- *Unreasonable demands*: These can frustrate the child because they are either beyond his/her ability or too many to handle at any one time. An unreasonable demand can also take the form of forcing the child into the mould of another person.

- *Double standard*: When the parent disapproves of the child for a certain behaviour but affirms another child for the same behaviour, confusing signals are sent.

- *Unkept promises*: The child will feel slighted and not taken seriously when the parent fails to keep a promise.

- *Parental absence*: When the parent fails to give time to the child or absents himself/herself at important events, the child will feel badly neglected. Parental presence is a powerful symbol of care and connectedness to the child.

To be parents worthy of obedience and honour, Paul goes on to mention two important things - 'training' (*paideia*) and 'instruction' (*nouthesia*). What Paul has in mind is imparting discipline in righteous living ('training') and correcting by word of mouth ('instruction') [Wood 1978:82]. These two aspects of domestic education imply the use of reproof, advice, encouragement and life example as means of child development. Today's Christian parents will do well to remember that their children's spiritual upbringing does not begin and end in church. Rather, what children learn in church about faith and righteous living must be reinforced at home by the words and actions of their parents. It is in the home that Christian education for children begins and continues.

Parents must seriously commit themselves to this dual task of training and instruction. The problem with today's affluent society is that many parents adopt a pampering attitude toward their children. Charles Swindoll (1987:106-07), President of the Dallas Theological



Seminary, warns that such an approach can backfire, and lists out twelve ways which can make a child delinquent instead of obedient:

- When your kid is still an infant, give him everything he wants. This way he'll think the world owes him a living when he grows up.
- When he picks up swearing and off-colour jokes, laugh at him, encourage him. As he grows up, he'll pick up 'cuter' phrases that will floor you.
- Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is twenty-one and let him decide for himself.
- Avoid using the word 'wrong'. It will give your child a guilt complex. You can condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
- Pick up after him - his books, shoes, and clothes. Do everything for him so he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility onto others.
- Let him read all printed matter he can get his hands on ... let him feast his mind on garbage.
- Quarrel frequently in his presence. Then he won't be too surprised when his home is broken up later.
- Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. Every sensual desire must be gratified; denial may lead to harmful frustrations.
- Give your child all the spending money he wants. Don't make him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you did?
- Take his side against neighbours, teachers, and policemen. They're all against him.
- When he gets into real trouble, make up excuses for yourself by saying, 'I never could do anything with him; he's just a bad seed.'
- Prepare for a life of grief.

Children are the Lord's gift. He wants them to observe His commandment to obey and to honour their parents. And therein lies the Lord's commandment to parents as well - to be worthy of their children's obedience and honour, and to glorify Him by bringing them up in the



knowledge, the way and the fear of the Lord. It will indeed grieve the Lord if Christian parents, especially fathers as representative heads of their families, fail to do this.

### 3.1.5 Genesis 12:1-5

1 The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

4 So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abram had already settled down in Haran with his father's household when God called him to leave the place in v 1. He was already very successful with many servants, and much possessions and land. But just when he thought he could comfortably spend the rest of his life in Haran, God had to come and disturb everything by saying: 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'<sup>31</sup> As the eldest son, he was in a position to enjoy much of the inheritance and influence in the family.<sup>32</sup> But God had to spoil it all with His ill-timed instruction. It is important to note that though God's imperative had specified that Abram was to leave his land, his relatives and his father's household, nothing was said about the land to which he would go. It does seem that 'divine imperatives seldom give the details of what is to happen, although they often specify what is

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<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann (1977:15) views Genesis as portraying 'land theology' - in Gn 1-11, people presumed upon the land and were eventually expelled from it; in Gn 12-50, they looked forward to the land yet to be possessed and were empowered by this anticipation.

<sup>32</sup> As the eldest son, Abram was mentioned first when the sons of Terah were named in Gn 11:27. The Masoretic reading of Gn 11:32 assumes Terah to be alive throughout most of Abram's life. On the other hand, the Samaritan reading makes Terah 145 years old when he died, thereby supporting the interpretation that Abram left Haran after his father's death (Wenham 1987:274).

not to be done' (Ross 1988:262). Hence, in Abram's case, he was called to journey as a man of faith and not as a man of fortune.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, to be a true man before God is to have the faith to release the things that symbolise one's control in life, to act obediently even without full knowledge, to be submissive to God's way, and to be God-dependent. But this goes against the very grain of what many would view as being a true man - to be in control, to know as much as possible before acting, to be assertive of having one's own way, and to be self-dependent. Such a view reflects the need for certainty, but as Ray Pritchard (1995:37) has wisely cautioned, your 100 % certainty may not equal 100 % of God's will for you, that is, when you think you are very certain on your part, you may already be very mistaken about God's best for you.

Von Rad (1972:161) mentions that by obeying the Lord's call, Abram replaced his faith in secured locality with faith in divine sovereignty. He says:

Abraham obeys blindly and without objection ... remains dumb ... becomes a kind of model ... to leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible. It is the reader himself who has to say that this departure also represented a 'change of faith.'

Wenham (1987:274) points out that what makes Abram's decision to uproot himself that much more exemplifying was that he was not confronted with a crisis situation. His leaving was not a desperate running away from trouble, but a deliberate forsaking of his comfort zone.

If Abram is to be one's example of a true man before God, then it means that one is to act in obedience to God's way even if one does not first know it all. You may plan and calculate as best as you humanly can, but when you are still faced with some unknowns, you

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<sup>33</sup> When Abram gave up his place in his father's household, he was placing his security, survival, identity and future in the hands of God. It is highly probable that Abram's family shared in the polytheism of the ancient world at that time. Hence, when God called, Abram might have viewed Him as a personal deity who was willing to be his 'divine sponsor'. In other words, when Abram left his country, he had no other deities to depend on but God Himself (Walton & Matthews 1997:35-37).

take that step of obedience in God anyway. You do what is humanly possible and you leave the impossible to God.

Abram's obedience also exemplifies that to obey God may mean letting go of some earthly riches in life. But the greatest accomplishment of a true man is not winning all the earthly riches in this life, but not losing faith and hope in God. When God called Abram out of his own country, He was calling him to a new journey, to 'burn some bridges', to lose some earthly riches, and to obey in spite of apparent losses. Yes, a man is true to God when he regards his greater accomplishment as being a man of faith rather than a man of fortune, learning to release his symbols of control in life and follow God even without knowing everything.

Archaeologists affirm that Haran was a first-class, flourishing city when Abram was there (Archer 1974:220).<sup>34</sup> In other words, Abram was not called by God to leave a backward place, but one that was highly affluent and civilised. And v 4 says that 'Abram left as the LORD had told him.' So, was Abram wise to leave such a place of great promise to somewhere he hardly knew anything about?

The answer is found in vv 2-3 where Abram actually left Haran after receiving a great promise of blessing from God.<sup>35</sup> Of course, this is very much a spiritual blessing that points ultimately to Jesus Christ coming from the nation of Israel to bless all mankind as the Messiah who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. And Abram would open this blessing to the nations of the world. Consequently, 'no one would be blessed apart from the blessings given through Abram and his seed.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> However, Brueggemann (1977:18) believes that Abram was asked to leave presumably barrenness for a more promising future. He draws this conclusion from Gn 11:30 which says that Sarai was barren.

<sup>35</sup> The term 'all peoples' in v 3 does not imply that every individual will be blessed, but rather, 'every major group in the world will be blessed' if they give due respect to Abram and his descendants (Wenham 1987:278).

<sup>36</sup> Because of the *niphal* (reflexive) form of the verb *wenibreku*, v 3 can be interpreted to read 'all the families of the earth will bless themselves' (depending on how they treat Abram and his seed). But since the form of the verb can also be taken as a passive, most translations have it as 'will be blessed in you'. In fact, the Septuagint

What does it mean when Abram left the flourishing city of Haran with this great promise of spiritual blessing? It means that when God called Abram out, He did not want him to live merely for earthly riches but to live daily with a sense of divine mission. Abram was to constantly remind himself that God had a mission for him that would not only affect him and his descendants, but also the whole world. Thus, Abram was not looking for another city designed and built by men when he left Haran, but one designed and built by God. Hebrews 11:10 affirms that Abram 'was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.' He set out in this new journey with a heavenly perspective.<sup>37</sup>

There are many opportunities for a man to make it good in this life. Abram's example reminds him that while capitalising on these opportunities, he should not merely be working for his own earthly kingdom, but for the Kingdom designed and built by God. For man whose natural tendency is to find his self-esteem in earthly accomplishments, this is a good reminder. On one hand, many Christian men are high achievers in the sense that they have climbed and reached the top of the ladder of success. On the other hand, these same people are poor performers before God in that when they have climbed and reached the top of the ladder of success, they fail to use their influence to make a difference for the Lord. A possible reason for them not taking their faith too seriously is that their down-to-earth instinct often causes them

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translated this verb as a passive, and this is also the version in Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8. This interpretation of the verb as a passive seems to 'harmonise better with the idea that salvation would go to the world through Abram's seed, Jesus Christ.' And the idea of curse in v 3 has to do with God removing this blessing from those who treat Abram and his faith lightly with disrespect (Ross 1988:264).

It has been commonly argued that a passive sense of the verb conveys a broader theological significance in that it points to God's plan of blessing all nations through the seed of Abraham. On the other hand, the reflexive sense would make Abraham as merely a reminder of God's blessing (Sailhamer 1990:114). Claus Westermann (1987:99) takes the reflexive sense of the verb, but suggests that there is little difference between the passive and reflexive sense in the final analysis. He said: 'If the "families of the earth" wish to be blessed by naming the name of Abraham, this translation implies, they will indeed receive a blessing.'

<sup>37</sup> Gn 12:5 says that Abram and his family left Haran with the 'people they had acquired.' Allen Ross (1988:265) suggests that it is unlikely that the word 'people' (*nepes* in Hebrew) refers to slaves. It certainly does not refer to children since Sarai was barren then. Hence, Ross hints that the word probably refers to proselytes. This implies that Abram was already sharing his faith when he was in Haran, proselytising others to the Lord.



to view religion as somewhat redundant in life. Consequently, they become merely career-minded for themselves, not mission-minded for the Lord (Pritchard 1995:73). They live only for their time, not for God's eternity. But Abram's example teaches that a man is true to God when he regards his greater accomplishment as being a man of faith rather than a man of fortune, always mindful of his mission to advance God's Kingdom in the midst of many opportunities to make it good in this life.

### 3.1.6 Mark 10:35-45

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'

36 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked.

37 They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'

38 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?'

39 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with,

40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

42 Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

In Mk 10:32-34, we find Jesus going up to Jerusalem with His disciples. Jesus was resolved to go though He already sensed the danger ahead. The disciples realised that something important was going to happen in Jerusalem which would culminate in all that Jesus had taught about the Kingdom of God. But it is likely that they did not quite understand what Jesus was saying to them. They could have misunderstood that Jesus was soon to assume earthly power and glory in Jerusalem. Also, it is likely that they had the thrones that Jesus



talked about in Mt 19:28 on their minds when they went up to Jerusalem with Him.<sup>38</sup> They were anticipating these thrones in an earthly sense. What they were asking and fighting for in Mk 10:35-45 was actually based on what Jesus had promised them earlier. Hence, the Lord did not condemn them for their ambitious desire to sit on these thrones and to be great. What Jesus did in this text was to redefine the meaning of 'greatness' from God's perspective.

In v 37, James and John made known their ambition to the Lord with these words, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' These were prime positions of honour, rank and power.

Responding to the asking of James and John, Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:245) have this to say:

The behaviour is in line with the nature of a faction: members are related to the central personage, Jesus, but not to each other. Here brothers, related to each other because of family ties, approach the central personage on their own behalf, disregarding the others ... This is how factions work in the Mediterranean.

In response, Jesus asked them in v 38, 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' When Jesus talked of drinking the cup and His baptism, He was referring to His suffering and death on the Cross - an experience that He was willing to accept and endure on behalf of sinful men.<sup>39</sup> By talking of the cup and His baptism, Jesus was expressing His great ambition to bring the world under His Lordship even if it was by way of suffering and death.

But there was an easy way for Jesus to achieve this same great ambition without going through suffering and death. And He knew of it even in the beginning days of His public

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<sup>38</sup> In this verse, Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

<sup>39</sup> In the OT, the cup is a common metaphor for God's wrath and judgment on human sin and rebellion ('e.g.' Ps 75:8; Is 51:17-23; Jr 25:15-28; Ezk 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zch 12:2). Also, Jesus called His passion a baptism because He understood His own baptism by John the Baptist as an expression of His solidarity with sinful men and His willingness to be judged on their behalf (Lane 1974:380-81).



ministry. But this easy way was not God's way. In fact, it was Satan's way. In Mt 4:8-9, we read of how Satan tempted Jesus by showing Him 'all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour,' and then said to Him, 'All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.'

But Jesus refused and rebuked the devil, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"' (Mt 4:10). He was bent on achieving His great ambition by following the hard way of God rather than the easy way of the devil. He knew that it would amount to nothing if He achieved His great ambition but, at the same time, ended up not worshipping and serving God.

Hence, when Jesus asked James and John if they could share in His cup and baptism, He was not merely asking them a question. He was actually challenging them to achieve whatever ambition they might have in God's way. It is likely that both James and John were ignorant of the deep implication in Jesus' question when they answered, 'We can' (v 39).<sup>40</sup> Jesus seemed to take them at their words and said to them, 'To sit on my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared' (v 40). You have to read the parallel account in Mt 20:20-28 in order to fully understand the implication in Jesus' words here.

In Matthew's account, James and John actually made their ambition known to Jesus accompanied by their mother. John MacArthur (1988:236) points out that a little comparing of the gospel accounts reveals that the mother of James and John was Salome whose husband was Zebedee, and she was also a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus.<sup>41</sup> This connection would make James and John cousins of Jesus, and their mother an aunt of the Lord. This then helps

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According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:246), the 'cup' refers to 'the limited and fixed amount of whatever God has to offer a person in life.'

<sup>40</sup> The answer of James and John received no criticism from Jesus who used it as an opportunity to show His foreknowledge of their suffering and fate for the gospel's sake (Gundry 1993:578).

<sup>41</sup> See Mt 27:56, Mk 15:40 and Jn 19:25.



one to understand why James and John would get their mother to speak on their behalf in Matthew's account - they wanted to use this family connection to get Jesus to give what they desired. This then clarifies why Jesus said to them, 'To sit at my right or my left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.' In essence, what Jesus was saying is this: 'Do not resort to human favouritism in your ambition to attain position of greatness and prestige. But trust that God in His impartiality would give the deserving ones their rightful places just as He has prepared for them.'<sup>42</sup> If James and John were truly able to share in His cup and baptism, Jesus would expect them to work toward their ambition just like Him - not compromising their integrity by taking an easier, faster but God-dishonouring way.

Christian men today would also do well to note this expectation of Jesus. Their masculine instinct often sets them out to seek for positions of greatness and prestige. While such ambitions are not necessarily wrong, they must not be pursued at the expense of Christian integrity. The so-called smarter and shorter way to the top may lead one to a life of crime and dishonesty. Hence, just as Jesus had admonished James and John, a man is to do his honest best to achieve his ambition, and he is also to accept what God will eventually work out as His best for him even if it means not being 'number one' or 'number two'.

Ambitions often cause tension and animosity. This happens even among the twelve disciples. When the other ten heard what James and John had asked of Jesus, 'they became indignant' (v 41).<sup>43</sup> They were angry with James and John for beating them in asking Jesus what they too wanted for themselves. Also, by asking Jesus to grant them the prime positions

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<sup>42</sup> Human favouritism often denies the most deserving of their rightful places. We use different labels for it today - corruption, collusion and nepotism - but they all mean the same thing basically. Such a practice is an attempt to undermine God's way.

<sup>43</sup> This was an old problem. Earlier in Mk 9:33-34, they had argued about who was the greatest among themselves.

of honour, James and John were implying that they were better; and this added more fuel to the anger of the other ten.

It is against this backdrop of tension and animosity that Jesus called the twelve disciples together in v 42. He went on to teach them that as they aspired to be great, they were not to lord or rule over one another like the Gentiles, but to work at being a servant and slave to one another (vv 43-44). A servant's role is to give of himself in serving others; a slave's role is to work for the benefit of his master. Hence, Jesus taught His disciples that true greatness would be found in the one who would serve and give of himself for the benefit of others. In pursuing their ambition to positions of greatness, Jesus wanted them to imitate Him as exemplified by His own life of servanthood and sacrifice in His messianic ambition (v 45).

While the world views greatness as the ability to rule and control others, Jesus redefines it as the ability to serve and give to others. Jesus as the Perfect Man has demonstrated with His own life what a truly great man is - one who always bears an attitude of servanthood. Indeed, the greatest achiever in the Lord's sight is the man who is never too important or successful to serve and give of himself for the benefit of others. Instead of controlling others in order to protect his best interest, a truly great man empowers others so that they can attain their best in life. As far as Jesus is concerned, a man diminishes himself when he focuses on self-elevation and forgets about servanthood in his life.

### 3.2 Sayings of Classical Church Figures<sup>44</sup>

3.2.1 St Augustine (354-430).<sup>45</sup> Though he did not condemn the opportunities that material riches could offer, Augustine did caution against placing the desire for material riches above that for God's will in one's life. He (Augustine 1972:18) said:

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<sup>44</sup> The church figures featured in this section are selected based on their significant contributions at some specific 'turning points' in church history.

<sup>45</sup> Aurelius Augustine is esteemed today as the Father of the Western Church. His thought dominated the Middle Ages. Both the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation were really discoveries of his

Thus a good servant would regard the will of God as his great resource, and he would be enriched in his mind by close attendance on God's will - not would he grieve if deprived in life of those possessions which he would soon have to leave behind at his death.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine was much against self-indulgence in material success. He (Augustine 1972:41-42) exhorted that material blessings should be used decently '... with moderation, with restraint, with self-control, with reverence ....' Otherwise, material success would result in a major failure in that it would bring about '... a moral corruption far worse than all the fury of an enemy.'

Augustine did not deny that man had a valid need for material things in order to live out his earthly existence. But these should be seen as blessings from God, and thus, man should draw himself closer to God even as he sought them (Augustine 1972:392).

Augustine was not advocating that we worship God for the sake of worldly riches. That would amount to using God for the purpose of worldly enjoyment. Rather, he stressed that one should use worldly riches to enrich and enjoy his/her worship of God. Thus, Augustine (1972:636) had this to say concerning man's love for the physically and materially attractive:

Now physical beauty ... if it is loved in preference to God, the eternal, internal and sempiternal Good, that love is as wrong as the miser's love of gold, with the abandonment of justice, though the fault is in the man, not in the gold. This is true of everything created; though it is good, it can be loved in the right way or in the wrong way - in the right way, that is, when the proper order is kept, in the wrong way when that order is upset.

While one feature of today's success syndrome is busyness in one's work, Augustine had called for a 'life of leisure.' But this is not a call to idleness, but to put one's preoccupation in life in proper perspective. As Augustine (1972:880) had said, 'The attraction

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thinking. Augustine was born at Thagaste in modern Algeria. He became the Bishop of Hippo in 396 until his death (Lane 1984:41-42).

<sup>46</sup> He was responding to what Paul said in 1 Tm 6:9 about falling into temptation as a result of wanting to become rich.



of a life of leisure ought not to be the prospect of lazy inactivity, but the chance for the investigation and discovery of truth ....' Augustine saw that even more important than man's material well-being was his immaterial well-being, that is, the wellness of his soul.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, one recurrent emphasis in the wisdom of Augustine on the notion of being successful is this - one turns material success into a major failure in life if he/she merely enjoys it without using it to enrich our worship of God and to advance His will.

On the topic of marriage and family, Augustine (1972:584) interpreted 'man and woman' as a reference to sexual partners, and not as '... a distinction between the ruling element and the ruled ....' He stressed that '... it would be a manifest absurdity to deny the fact that male and female were created for the purpose of begetting children ....' In fact, Augustine had a high view of children for he undoubtedly believed that they were God's blessed gift.

Augustine viewed sex in marriage as for the purpose of procreation and not for pleasure. He argued that to procreate was to fulfil God's command to 'be fruitful and fill the earth,' but to derive pleasure is to gratify the lust in oneself (Geisler 1982:212-13).<sup>48</sup>

In writing his *Confessions*, Augustine spoke with gratitude about his godly mother who out of grief for his errant ways, had prayed and exhorted him to walk the right path.<sup>49</sup> It may not be too far-fetched to conclude that Augustine would endorse the importance of parental influence because of his experience with his own mother and his high view of children.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine viewed man as made up of soul (immaterial) and body (material). Thus, he considered the human soul as the same as the human spirit.

Augustine viewed both men and women as created with rational souls. However, men possess the ability to dominate while women only represent the nature to be dominated. Hence, he regarded women as lacking 'the image of God and are related to God's image only by being included under male headship' (Ruether 1996:97).

But Augustine did not intend to speak of female inferiority. Rather, he regarded the female role as only different from that of the male, and her submission to man was only an expression of her obedience to God (Ruether 1996:101).

<sup>48</sup> In *What Augustine Says*, Norman Geisler quotes some of what Augustine had written in his works.

<sup>49</sup> Read Books III, VI, VIII and IX of *The Confessions Of St Augustine* for an idea of how Augustine's mother (Monnica) had impacted his life.

<sup>50</sup> This writer has found very little reference to marriage-family life in his readings of Augustine.

On issues related to manhood, Augustine talked about them by addressing the three loves of a 'right' man before God. First, this man is one who loves God by living according to His divine standard. In fact, '... man was created right, on condition that he should live by the standard of his creator, not by his own, carrying out not his own will, but his creator's. Falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created' (Augustine 1972:552).<sup>51</sup> Hence, a man's accomplishment is mere vanity if it is not attained in the way of God.

Besides his love for God, the 'right' man is one who loves others. Honour and power in this life are not necessarily bad for him because he can use them to promote the well-being of others. Hence, Augustine (1972:880) shared this concerning the ambition to be in places of honour and power:

... what is to be treasured is not a place of honour and power in this life, since 'everything under the sun is vanity' but the task itself that is achieved by means of that place of honour and that power - if that achievement is right and helpful, that is, if it serves to promote the well-being of the common people ... according to God's intention.

The third love of the 'right' man is that of self-love. Commenting on Paul's call in Gl 6:4 to take pride in oneself, Augustine (1972:199) said that a 'true man' was one who took pride in all that he did because he '... go for honour, glory and power "the right way", without trickery and deceit.' Augustine (Geisler 1982:202) approved of this kind of self-love:

Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself ... He is to be taught, too, in what measure to love his body, so as to care for it wisely and within due limits ....

But Augustine also cautioned that self-love could be in the form of love for human praise. He (Augustine 1972:203) warned that one should not try to be 'good' in order to win the praises of man for he should only desire to please God and gain His approval.

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<sup>51</sup> The man who does not live by God's standard is termed an 'animal man' by Augustine (1972:553) because of his carnality.

And a valid kind of self-love also does not permit one to be mastered by the things in life. How then should a man love himself with the things he pursues or possesses in life? The Augustinian answer is:

... with perfect readiness serve the Lord whom he loves, the highest peace; and as regards all other things, must either rule them as subject to himself, or treat them with a view to their subjection (Geisler 1982:204).

In sum, a man who reaches his 'right and good' stature before God is not one who simply shuns possession, position and power in life; so heavenly minded that he sees no earthly use in these. Rather, Augustine described such a man as one of temperance and fortitude even with his earthly ambitions and accomplishments:

First, then, let us consider temperance, which promises us a kind of integrity and incorruption in the love by which we are united to God. The office of temperance is in restraining and quieting the passions which make us pant for those things which turn us away from the laws of God and from the enjoyment of His goodness, that is, in a word, from the happy life.

The love, then, of which we speak, which ought with all sanctity to burn in desire for God, is called temperance, in not seeking for earthly things, and fortitude, in bearing the loss of them (Geisler 1982:205).

3.2.2 Martin Luther (1483-1546). At a time of bustling economic activities and when success was measured very much in material terms, Luther (1962:250) sounded his warning against greed:

When the price of goods is not fixed either by law or custom, and you must fix it yourself, here one can truly give you no instructions but only lay it on your conscience to be careful not to overcharge your neighbour, and to seek a modest living, not the goods of greed.

However, in responding to what is meant by 'the worker deserves his wages' in Lk 10:7, Luther advised that a worker should not unfairly shortchange himself. Honest efforts deserve fair returns. He (Luther 1962:251) said:

In determining how much profit you ought to take on your business and your labour, there is no better way to reckon it than by computing the amount of time and labour you have put into it, and comparing that with the effort of a day labourer who works at some other occupation and seeing how much he





earns in a day. On that basis figure how many days you have spent in getting your wares and bringing them to your place of business, and how much labour and risk was involved; for a great amount of labour and time ought to have a correspondingly greater return.

Luther also cautioned against making oneself vulnerable to corrupt practices in work and business. He (Luther 1962:272) called for an uncompromising stand for honesty and integrity in view of excessive profiteering in his time:

This is why no one need ask how he may with a good conscience be a member of a trading company. My only advice is this: Get out; they will not change. If the trading companies are to stay, right and honesty must perish; if right and honesty are to stay, the trading companies must perish.<sup>52</sup>

On the matter of marriage and family, it must first be noted that Luther held a high view of marriage. In fact, he considered marriage as the natural and needful thing for most people. He viewed singlehood as a special calling and work of God, and said thus: 'Therefore, priests, monks, and nuns are duty-bound to forsake their vows whenever they find that God's ordinance to produce seed and to multiply is powerful and strong within them' (Luther 1962:18-21).

Luther exhorted a man to take delight in his wife and learn to accept her as God's gift in spite of her imperfections. He (Luther 1962:38-39) said:

Many *have* wives, but few *find* wives. Why? They are blind; they fail to see that their life and conduct with their wives is the work of God and pleasing in his sight. Could they find that, then no wife would be so hateful, so ill-tempered, so ill-mannered, so poor, so sick that they would fail to find in her their heart's delight and would always be reproaching God for his work, creation, and will. And because they see that it is the good pleasure of their beloved Lord, they would be able to have peace in grief, joy in the midst of bitterness, happiness in the midst of tribulations, as the martyrs have in suffering.<sup>53</sup>

While most men today, and even in Luther's time, would consider homemaking too demeaning for them, Luther (1962:40-41) offers this corrective:

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<sup>52</sup> The trading companies in Luther's time obviously engaged in corrupt and dishonest practices, resulting in excessive profiteering by them.

<sup>53</sup> In the same way, this is also how wives should view their husbands.





Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool - though that father is acting in Christian faith - my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling - not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.<sup>54</sup>

Luther regarded children as God's 'greatest good' in marriage. As an act of responsible stewardship toward this blessing, he (Luther 1962:46) urged parents to guide their children unto godliness and to exercise their rightful control over them:

But the greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labour worthwhile, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him ... Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.

Parenting that is pleasing to God directs itself at shaping the child with proper discipline. Indeed, Luther (1989:636) spoke harshly against spoiling children:

You could do no more disastrous work than to spoil the children, let them curse and swear, let them learn profane words and vulgar songs, and just let them do as they please. What is more, some parents use enticements to be more alluring to meet the dictates of the world of fashion, so that they may please only the world, get ahead, and become rich, all the time giving more attention to the care of the body than to the due care of the soul. There is no greater tragedy in Christendom than spoiling children.

Though against spoiling children with material indulgence, Luther did remind the fathers of his time that their 'first and greatest obligation' was to provide for the material needs of their families.<sup>55</sup> He said this so that fathers would give priority to their homes and not be negligent toward their family members (Luther 1962:259).

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<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Luther also calls on wives to view their family duties toward husbands and children as 'truly golden and noble works.'

<sup>55</sup> Though this instruction is specifically about meeting financial needs at home, it can be applied to the other family needs as well.

On the matter of manhood, if the natural tendency of man is to find his worth in accomplishments, is it then right for him to work hard and well for them? Luther would encourage a man to work hard and well, even to aspire to an office of great influence. But then, material possession, human praise and earthly power are not to be his ultimate goals. Luther (1959:272) speaks of a higher motivation for the man:

... the heart is right when a man says: Even though I should receive a living from it, I have not let it go at that, but rather, because God has called and commanded me to this office in order to administer it faithfully and diligently to his praise and the salvation of souls, I do this gladly from the heart for the sake of the Word. In doing this I do not seek love, friendship, honour, and thanks from the people; it rather issues from the heart and performs this before it receives honour, money, or favour, although if these come and follow, I may have and receive them without sin.

Luther exemplified this higher motivation in his own life. Like a true man himself, he overcame much odds and achieved some great successes that had permanent effects on human history. Hence, Luther's courage and conviction typify the passion of a man after God; the will of one who accomplishes great things for God's glory and others' good.<sup>56</sup>

3.2.3 John Wesley (1703-1791).<sup>57</sup> In the midst of all the choices and opportunities that promise a good life today, Wesley calls for a deliberate submission to the will of God by

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Luther was born at Eisleben in eastern Germany. He was working at becoming a lawyer but after a narrow escape from death, he became an Augustinian monk at Erfurt and studied theology there. Luther later became a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. All this while, he understood God as one who judged and weighed his merits in life. But one day, he saw the meaning of 'the righteousness of God' in a new way. It is not the righteousness by which God condemns us, but that by which He justifies us by faith. Luther then understood righteousness as a gift given to the believer by God. Consequently, he discarded the idea that we must do our very best before God will help us. He became particularly outraged by the belief that one's sins could be forgiven simply by the purchase of an indulgence. He wrote 95 theses against this belief and practice, and these aroused great interest in all Germany. Also, unrest was stirred up over the excessive taxes paid to the Church in Rome. This hurt the papacy financially and steps were taken to silence Luther. In 1520, Luther was excommunicated for his open rebellion against papal authority. In 1521, Emperor Charles V ordered him to recant his 'heresy' at the Diet of Worms, but Luther replied, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' After Worms, his supporters kidnapped him while he was on his way home because they feared for his life. They kept him in a castle called the Wartburg. There, Luther translated the Bible into German for the common people. In the later days of Protestantism, Luther disagreed strongly with the Swiss reformer Zwingli. This led to the permanent division of the Protestant Church into Lutheran and reformed camps. Luther is especially remembered for his doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ (Lane 1984:127-31).

<sup>57</sup> John Wesley was born in Lincolnshire, England. He studied at Oxford and later became a Fellow of Lincoln College. There, he co-founded the Holy Club which was for people who seriously wanted to live out their religion. In 1735, Wesley went to Georgia as a missionary, but was quickly exposed of his lack of assurance in

'taking up our cross.' He defines this 'taking up' as 'voluntarily suffer what it is in our power to avoid; when we willingly embrace the will of God, though contrary to our own; when we choose what is painful, because it is the will of our wise and gracious Creator' (Wesley 1979a:109).

Many people today work hard to succeed in life, but unfortunately, at the expense of their health. While they may consider this a lofty sacrifice, Wesley (1979a:127) has this to say:

But this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of our health. Therefore, no gain whatsoever should induce us to enter into, or to continue in, any employ, which is of such a kind, or is attended with so hard or so long labour, as to impair our constitution. Neither should we begin or continue in any business which necessarily deprives us of proper seasons for food and sleep, in such a proportion as our nature requires ... And, if we are already engaged in such an employ, we should exchange it, as soon as possible, for some which, if it lessen our gain, will, however, not lessen our health.

Competition is one reality which one has to face in the business world today. With globalisation, competition has been very much intensified. The danger is that one may resort to unethical practices in order to come out tops. Wesley (1979a:127-28) stresses the need to uphold integrity and proper ethics in work and business:

Other businesses there are which, however innocent in themselves, cannot be followed with innocence now ... for instance, as will not afford a competent maintenance without cheating or lying, or conformity to some custom which is not consistent with a good conscience: These, likewise, are sacredly to be avoided ... for to gain money, we must not lose our souls.

We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below the market-price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour's trade, in order to advance our own; much less can we entice away, or receive, any of his servants or workmen

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his own salvation by a Moravian pastor. He returned to England in 1738, and recorded these words in his journal on 25 May while reading Luther: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' Wesley then began to preach salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, but this was not well taken by the Church of England. It was a time of moral and religious decline. Wesley (and other evangelical preachers) had to preach in open places as church pulpits were closed to them. Consequently, the gospel was spread to the masses and Britain experienced the Evangelical Revival. Together with his younger brother, Charles, John Wesley formed the Methodist Church because of the increasingly hostile attitude of the Church of England (Lane 1984:168-69).



whom he has need of. None can gain by swallowing up his neighbour's substance, without gaining the damnation of hell!

But Wesley does support diligent and honest work as the 'first and great rule of Christian wisdom.' He (Wesley 1979a:130) urges people to cultivate a spirit of excellence in their work:

Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time ... Never leave anything till to-morrow, which you can do to-day. And do it as well as possible ... Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner.

And as one succeeds in life, there is this tendency to upgrade to better things or to impress others. To this, Wesley (1979a:131) cautions against the ills of being discontent with what we already have:

Do not waste any part of so precious a talent, merely in gratifying the desire of the eye, by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments. Waste no part of it in curiously adorning your houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding, books; in elegant rather than useful gardens.

Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men ... Men are expensive in diet, or apparel, or furniture, not barely to please their appetite, or to gratify their eye, or their imagination, but their vanity too ... But do not buy their applause so dear. Rather be content with the honour that cometh from God.

While not against material success, Wesley does envisage that it can lead people down the slippery path of indulgence and discontentment if it is all that matters in their lives. He (Wesley 1979b:8-9) exhorts God's people to 'gain all we can and save all we can in order to give all we can.'<sup>58</sup> Hence, God's people are to counter greed with the grace of giving.

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<sup>58</sup> It has been documented that the Wesley home was destroyed by fire one day. The family lacked the financial resources to recover from this loss. Hence, as a result of Wesley's own policies which forbade personal savings, his seven children and three sisters lived the rest of their lives in debt. This left deep emotional scars in them (Schneider 1994:173-74).



On family life, Wesley has much to say about parent-child relationship. In the area of discipline, he strongly believes in not spoiling the child by sparing the rod. But such disciplining is to be done in love and only after other attempts have failed:

Your children, while they are young, you may restrain from evil, not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but also by correction; only remembering, that this means is to be used last, - not till all other have been tried, and found to be ineffectual. And even then you should take the utmost care to avoid the very appearance of passion. Whatever is done with mildness; nay, indeed, with kindness too. Otherwise your own spirit will suffer loss, and the child will reap little advantage (Wesley 1979b:80).

In a similar vein, Wesley (1979b:92) advocates the shaping of a child's will early in life:

A wise parent, on the other hand, should begin to break their will the first moment it appears ... The will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God. Therefore studiously teach them to submit to this while they are children, that they may be ready to submit to His will when they are men. But in order to carry this point, you will need incredible firmness and resolution; for after you have once begun, you must never more give way.

Wesley also encourages parents to exemplify simplicity before their children in their own lifestyle. 'Instil diligently into them the love of plain dress, and hatred of finery. Show them the reason of your own plainness of dress, and show it is equally reasonable for them,' he (Wesley 1979b:106) said to parents.

Though many parents would view leaving much behind for their children as a responsible and loving act, Wesley (1979a:132-33) calls for prudence:

If I had one child, elder or younger, who knew the value of money, one who, I believe, would put it to the true use. I should think it my absolute, indispensable duty, to leave that child the bulk of my fortune; and to the rest just so much as could enable them to live in a manner they had been accustomed to do. 'But what, if all your children were equally ignorant of the true use of money?' I ought then ... to give each what would keep him above want; and to bestow all the rest in such a manner as I judged would be most for the glory of God.

Even in life's many choices and opportunities, parents play an important role in guiding their children to make not just good, but godly, decisions. Specifically, in a child's choice of a vocation in life, the lament of Wesley (1979b:84) is this:

'In what business will your son be most likely to love and serve God? In what employment will he have the greatest advantage for laying up treasure in heaven? I have been shocked above measure in observing how little this is attended to, even by pious parents! Even these consider only how he may get most money; not how he may get most holiness!'<sup>59</sup>

Though living in a long gone generation, Wesley's wisdom still finds relevance in today's dual-income families. To those working parents who depend on housemaids to care for their children, Wesley (1979b:96) gives this stern instruction:

Your servants, who will not understand your plan, will be continually giving little things to your children, and thereby undoing all your work. This you must prevent, if possible, by warning them when they first come into your house, and repeating the warning from time to time. If they *will* do it notwithstanding, you must turn them away. Better lose a good servant than spoil a good child.<sup>60</sup>

And there is this question of being a man of God: Can a Christian man be well acquainted with the world and yet be after God? Wesley believes this is possible if one takes care to increase in the grace of God. He (Wesley 1979a:461) prescribes the practice this way:

'But the persons in question are useful to me, in carrying on my temporal business. Nay, on many occasions, they are necessary to me; so that I could not well carry it on without them.' Instances of this kind frequently occur. And this is doubtless a sufficient reason for your contracting an intimate acquaintance with them. And you here need to take the utmost care, 'lest even by that converse with them which is necessary, while your fortune in the world increases, the grace of God should decrease in your soul.'<sup>61</sup>

The true measure of a man is not in the quantity of his possessions, but the quality of his stewardship. And Wesley (1979b:355-56) so contrasts a 'rich' man with a 'poor' man:

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<sup>59</sup> In jest and sarcasm, some godly parents are said to desire that their brightest child becomes a doctor and their dullest one becomes a pastor.

<sup>60</sup> Working parents must still be responsible for instilling right values in their children even if there is caregiving help by maids, grandparents or child care centres.

<sup>61</sup> The implication is that one must be prepared to forego worldly gains in order not to compromise his Christian position. To increase in the grace of God is also to do more good, by the grace of God, with the more we have.





But a man may be rich that has not a hundred a year, nor even one thousand pounds in cash. Whosoever has food to eat, and raiment to put on, with something over, is rich. Whosoever has the necessaries and conveniences of life for himself and his family, and a little to spare for them that have not, is properly a rich man; unless he is a miser, a lover of money, one that hoards up what he can and ought to give to the poor. For if so, he is a poor man still, though he has millions in the bank; yea, he is the poorest of men ....

3.2.4 Charles Spurgeon (1843-1892).<sup>62</sup> Even in Spurgeon's time, business activities were very much an accepted way of livelihood. Men were especially drawn to the challenges in the business world. Though he recognised the validity and value of economic success, Spurgeon did warn, especially Christian men, not to allow their diligence in business to become an indulgence in greed. He (Spurgeon 1977b:327-28) said:

There is a laudable pursuit of gain, without which business would not be properly carried on; but there is a line, scarcely as broad as a razor's edge, between diligence in business and greediness for gain. We can so easily pass from the one into the other, that we may hardly be aware of it ourselves. When a man is increasing his investments, when he is enlarging his warehouse, when he is employing a larger number of persons than formerly, or even when he is bemoaning the depression of his trade, and his heart is aching because he has to do only half as much business as before, covetousness may insinuate itself into his conversation ... 'Let your conversation - your daily conduct - be without covetousness.' Any brother here - and it is to the brethren mainly that the temptation comes, I think, - any brother here may have present need of such a warning as this.

Spurgeon also exposed a popular myth in his time - the belief that one would be contented if only there was a little more. But the reality, then and now, is that the desire to gain or possess a little more often does not lead to contentment, but to an insatiable appetite for more. Spurgeon (1977b:328) exhorted people to be happy with what they already had:

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born at Kelvedon, Essex. His father was a Congregational minister. In 1850, Spurgeon was converted and rebaptised as an adult believer. After his baptism, he joined a Baptist church in Cambridge and soon discovered his gift as a preacher. He later pastored the Baptist church in New Park Street, Southwark, London. The chapel proved too small for the great crowds who came to hear Spurgeon. Hence, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, costing 31 000 pounds was eventually built. Spurgeon preached there from 1861 till just before his death. He was Calvinist in theology though he attacked both extremes of Protestant theology at that time (hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism). He also clashed with the Anglicans and his fellow Baptists, accusing the former of inconsistency in their view of baptism, and the latter of 'modernist' theology. Despite these controversies, Spurgeon is still esteemed as a great preacher and his printed sermons are still read by many (Douglas 1992:636).

It is supposed by most persons that they could be content if they were not exactly what they are, and where they are: but the precept exhorts them to be content with their present circumstances. If they had a little more they would be satisfied; but that is not the contentment to which we are exhorted: it is written, 'Be content with such things ye have' ... I once thought that a million would satisfy any mortal man; but I have been assured by one who has considerable experience in that direction that he who has one million is unable to see any reason why he should not have two or ten ... So far as earthly things are concerned, he is the happiest, nay, he is the richest man, who is content with such things as he has.<sup>63</sup>

Spurgeon preached on God's perspective of success in one's life - not in terms of always having one's desires fulfilled, but in terms of trusting in God's goodness in all circumstances. He (Spurgeon 1977b:356) pointed out that this trust would grant a sense of sufficiency in life:

When God's will and our will are contrary to one another, we may be sure that there is something amiss with us. We are never right till God's will becomes our will, and we can honestly say, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Therefore it is a sad thing when a Christian man cannot say, 'I have enough;' but it is a very sweet thing when he can truthfully say it. Then does he really enjoy life, - when he thanks God for health, and also for sickness, - when he thanks God for gains, and also for losses ... He proves then that he does not follow God for what he gets out of him ... but that he follows God out of sincere love to him, because God is his Master, and he belongs to him. It is true blessedness, a little heaven begun below, when the Christian, looking all round, can say of all temporal things, 'I have enough.'

In the area of family life, Spurgeon preached much on how parents were to discharge their responsibilities. He asserted that the best thing which parents could give to their children was the truth about God. Indeed, for Spurgeon, the sweetest confession of children before their parents would be these words: 'We would join with the people of God for we trust we belong to them' (Spurgeon 1977a:421).

Many men are fretful about the future as they feel responsible in providing well for their families. While this sense of responsibility is commendable, what is undesirable is the

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<sup>63</sup> The Bible verse quoted is taken from Heb 13:5.

shifting of trust from God to self. Fathers are to provide for their families by first trusting in the paternal care of God themselves. Spurgeon (1977b:344) puts it this way:

Many a man lies awake at night desiring to increase his income, not because he is ambitious to be rich, but because he is haunted with the fear of being poor. Gifted, perhaps, for the present with competency, he is still scared with dire forebodings - 'What will become of my family if I die?' 'Or should such and such a source of income be dried up, and it is very precarious, what then will become of my household? What then?' Full many are not content with such things as they have because of the dread of a distant season of trial is constantly harassing them.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' The censure, therefore, falls where this sacred pledge is unheeded ... If God would have thee live by the day, why dost thou want to gather enough for seven days at once? If thy Father bids thee trust him, why dost thou distrust his paternal care? Use prudent thrift by all means; do not waste what he gives, nor heedlessly forget that you will have wants on the morrow as well as to-day; but abstain from fretfulness, abjure murmuring, and abhor every tendency to unbelief ....

Many busy fathers today are in danger of sacrificing their families. They may unknowingly neglect family needs and the spiritual upbringing of their young at home because of their busyness elsewhere. Spurgeon (1977c:355) issues this rebuke:

May I next ask you to look into *your own house* and home? It is a dreadful thing when a man does not cultivate the field of his own family. I recollect in my early days a man who used to walk out with me into the villages when I was preaching. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts, and then I shook him off ... He had many children, and these grew up to be wicked young men and women, and the reason was that the father, while he would be at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own children to the Saviour. What is the use of zeal abroad if there is neglect at home? How sad to say, 'My own vineyard have I not kept!' Have you never heard of one who said he did not teach his children the ways of God because he thought they were so young that it was very wrong to prejudice them, and he had rather leave them to choose their own religion when they grew older? ... Cultivate a child's heart for good, or it will go wrong of itself, for it is already depraved by nature.

One way in which parents can influence their children is by example. In fact, godly values will be better grasped by children if piety is modelled before them at home. Thus, Spurgeon (1977c:355-56) reminds parents of their high calling to be spiritual models to their children:



May fathers and mothers set such an example of cheerful piety that sons and daughters shall say, 'Let us tread in our father's footsteps, for he was a happy and a holy man. Let us follow our mother's ways, for she was sweetness itself.' If piety does not rule in your house, when we pass by your house we shall see disorder, disobedience, pride of dress, folly, and the beginnings of vice.

And with special reference to the father as a model and nurturer of godly values at home, Spurgeon (1977c:369) adds:

I have known this sin find people out *in their families*. There is a Christian man: we honour and love him, but he has a son that is a drunkard. Did his good father ever bear any protest against strong drink in all his life? No; he did not like the blue ribbon, of course. I will not dispute about total abstinence, but I do not feel much astonished at a boy drinking much when he sees his godly father drink a little regularly. Every man should labour by precept and example to put down intemperance, and he who does not do so may be sure that his sin will find him out.

On the subject of masculinity, man generally likes competition, and tends to capitalise on his opportunities and positions in order to outdo others.<sup>64</sup> In fact, Spurgeon himself speaks well of healthy competition, that is, that which spurs us to do our best to the glory of God. What Spurgeon (1977b:342-43) cautions against is to allow competition to breed envy and the evil to destroy others:

In some others this covetous principle shows itself in *envying others*. If others are better off, or more esteemed, they straightway seem to regard them as enemies, cannot think well of them, cannot wish them well, would almost rejoice to see them dragged down. I have known some poor people who were prouder still: and their envying of those who were better off has developed in them a pride of an almost ferocious character, akin to the fury of savages ... If the Lord has given you one talent, use it; but do not waste your time in finding fault with him who has five talents. If your Master makes you a hewer of wood, throw your strength into your felling and cleaving, do not throw the axe at your fellow-servant; and if he makes you a drawer of water, do not empty your buckets on your neighbour, but do your own service well, and bring what you have done and lay it at your Master's feet. This will be thankworthy: this will be Christlike.

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<sup>64</sup> Spurgeon (1977b:350) did preach that a man ought to make full use of the opportunities and positions that God had bestowed on him.



Many Christian men have been tempted to compromise their Christian position in order to have a winning edge as they compete with others. To them, to succeed is to achieve the desired results; to show evidence of such fruitfulness. But Spurgeon begs to differ for he views faithfulness to God as more important than fruitfulness in one's labour. The true measure of a man is not so much in terms of his fruitfulness in all his labour, but in terms of his faithfulness to God in all that he has done. Thus, Spurgeon (1977b:350) so exhorts Christians to guard their integrity and faithfulness:

You will be master of the situation yet. 'Alas, sir, but I am threatened with the loss of my situation unless I will go contrary to divine commands.' Then do not flinch, but tell your heavenly Father about it. Commit your cause to him. Let not fifty places or five hundred people make you swerve from the course that faith dictates and duty demands. Appeal to God, and he will provide for you. Any temporary loss you may sustain will be much more than made up in the prosperity he awards you: or if not in that way, in the peace he vouchsafes you and the honour he confers on you in suffering for Christ's sake.

### 3.3 Thoughts of Contemporary Christian Thinkers

3.3.1 Richard Foster.<sup>65</sup> Foster points to 'the dark side of money' when he discusses the subject of success. There is a general tendency to downplay Jesus' radical criticism of wealth because it clashes with what is often considered to constitute an abundant life.<sup>66</sup> Foster (1985:21-22) advocates replacing fear of material deficiency with trust in God's sufficiency.

He also alerts one to two distorted views on wealth. The first is to view wealth as a sure sign of God's blessing and approval. Foster refutes this by pointing out that Jesus Himself has made it clear in Lk 6:24 that wealth itself is no assurance of God's blessing and approval. The second distorted view is to take money as only neutral, and is to be used as best as one can in order to be God's good stewards. However, Foster thinks otherwise for he sees money

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Foster is an authority in Christian spirituality. He is also Associate Professor of Theology and Writer in Residence at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas. What he has written in his book, *Money, Sex and Power*, are gleaned and presented here as his thoughts on success, marriage-family life and masculinity. The views of the others in this section are presented as responses to Foster's thoughts on these subjects.

<sup>66</sup> These harsh words of Jesus are found in Mt 6:19; 19:24; Lk 6:24, 30; 12:15, 33; 16:13.



as not neutral, but as having a 'power' that can be demonic in character. Thus, he considers money as a power seeking to dominate and to inspire devotion in people (Foster 1985:23-26).<sup>67</sup>

In fact, so perturbed is Foster (1985:28) about the god-like nature of money that he issues this warning:

For Christ money is an idolatry we must be converted from in order to be converted to Him. The rejection of the god mammon is a necessary precondition to becoming a disciple of Jesus. And in point of fact, money has many of the characteristics of deity. It gives us security, can induce guilt, gives us freedom, gives us power and seems to be omnipresent. Most sinister of all, is its bid for omnipotence.

In Jesus' radical criticism of the rich, Foster (1985:30-31) argues that this only makes sense when one understands the spirituality of money; that it is one of the 'principalities and powers' that must be conquered.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of all his radical assertions, Foster (1985:46) does make an attempt to bring out the 'light side' side of money by saying that 'the call of God is for us to use money within the confines of a properly disciplined spiritual life and to manage money for the good of all humanity and for the glory of God.' He cites Jesus' call to use unrighteous mammon to make friends in Lk 16:1-13 as a teaching to use money to advance God's kingdom, not for economic benefits. Also, since there will be people in heaven, Foster (1985:54-55) interprets the instruction to 'lay up treasures in heaven' in Mt 6:19-21 as investing in the lives of people

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<sup>67</sup> When Jesus uses the Aramaic term *mammon* for wealth, Foster interprets this as Jesus giving wealth a personal and spiritual character. Thus, when the Lord says in Mt 6:24, 'You cannot serve God and mammon,' He is personifying wealth as a rival god.

<sup>68</sup> Foster (1985:31-35) looks at how Jesus has criticised the prosperous fool (Lk 12:16-21), the wealthy man who shuns Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) and the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-30), and suggests some ways to conquer and redeem the 'dark side' of money:

- Create an atmosphere of confession concerning one's seduction by money ('e g' talking with someone honestly about this struggle with money).
- Keep in touch with the poor by feeling with and learning from them.
- Experience inner renunciation by holding lightly onto material possessions (see these as 'given by God, owned by God, and to be used for the purposes of God').
- Give gladly and generously to destroy greed in one's life.



with the money one has. Hence, he urges people to work not merely for money, but to enhance human life.<sup>69</sup> The whole emphasis here is to affirm human value above economic value, and to urge Christians to see their 'bottom line' in terms of human needs and not monetary needs (Foster 1985:64-65).

The attitude of Foster (1985:61) toward money can perhaps be best summed up by his own words:

Step on it. Yell at it. Laugh at it. List it way down on the scale of values ...  
Money is made for taking, for bargaining, for manipulating, but not for giving.  
This is exactly why giving has such ability to defeat the powers of money.

And drawing from what the Bible teaches in Phlp 6:6 & 11 and 2 Cor 6:10, Foster (1985:71) crusades for a lifestyle of simplicity:

We who follow Jesus Christ are called to a vow of simplicity ... It is not an option to take or leave depending on our personal preference ... Simplicity seeks to do justice to our Lord's many-faceted teachings about money - light and dark, giving and receiving, trust, contentment, faith.

By simplicity, Foster (1985:72-73) clarifies that he is not referring to rigid asceticism. Rather, he is referring to the discipline that exercises modesty and temperance while rejoicing in the gracious provisions of God. It involves voluntary abstinence from luxury and extravagance so that resources can be used to meet others' needs.

Foster does not seem to have a high view of money, and he discourages measuring life's success in terms of material wealth. His claims that money has a power of demonic nature and that Christians should take a vow of simplicity underscore his belief that money is at best a necessary evil in this fallen world.

On the subject of marriage-family life, Foster (1985:94) attributes the domination of women by men through the ages as a result of the Fall. It is not part of God's good creation.

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<sup>69</sup> An example of this is to take up a job that has more life-changing potential even if it offers less pay and prestige.

In fact, the saying that 'the man shall rule over you' in Gn 3:16 is a curse from God. It is indicative that the original intent of God for marriage has been corrupted by the Fall.<sup>70</sup>

Commenting on the distortion of sexuality after the Fall, Foster (1985:106) has this to say:

The notion of female inferiority is a false and soul-destroying doctrine ... The argument that, although the woman is not inferior to the man she is different from him and therefore necessarily subordinate to him, is not compelling. Differences are obvious, but they do not necessarily entail hierarchical arrangements.

We need to be reminded that the rule of the male *over* the female is not a description of pristine sexuality before the fall but of the curse of the fall ... Sexism is sexuality's distortion, not its wholeness.

Foster's understanding of gender roles in the family rests in his interpretation of Paul in Eph 5:21-23. He sees Paul as advocating the principle of mutual subordination and responsibility in the family. When Paul exhorts man and wife to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' in Eph 5:21, he is calling for Christ-like submission through sacrificial love. Foster (1985:158) sees Paul as moving from a patriarchal/authoritarian approach to a partnership/companionship approach in husband-wife relationship.

Paul breaks radically from the patriarchal/authoritarian system of the past in Eph 5:21 ('be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ'). However, he immediately reconnects with the tradition of the past in v 22 ('wives be subject ... for the husband is the head').<sup>71</sup>

In explaining this apparent ambivalence of Paul in Eph 5:21-23, Foster (1985:160) quotes the words of Elizabeth Achtemeier:

The passage ... has preserved the traditional view of the male as the head of the family, but that headship is a function only, not a matter of status or superiority. The understanding of the headship and of the wife's relation to it

<sup>70</sup> Foster (1985:105) sees sexism (the man's drive to dominate and control the woman) as a distortion of sexuality.

<sup>71</sup> The word *kephale* ('head') has been translated by some to mean 'source', thereby distancing the passage from the hierarchical model for the man-wife relationship. Also, v 22 (as in the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*) simply says 'wives to your husbands'; the verb 'be subject' or 'submit' must thus be supplied from v 21 (Foster 1985:159).



has been radically transformed. There is no lording over the other here, no exercise of sinful power, no room for unconcern or hostility toward the other. Instead there is only the full devotion of love, poured out for the other, in imitation of Christ's faithfulness and yearning and sacrifice for his church, and of the church's like response to him.<sup>72</sup>

This headship of the man in the family imparts to him a certain measure of power. But it is a power that acts to serve others rather than to make others subservient. Foster (1985:232) sees this power as service and describes how it can be worked out in the home: 'Household duties are important because self-worth and a sense of contributing to the welfare of the family are important. Discipline is no small task, but it is one way we serve our children.'

Hence, Foster believes that man should love his wife as an equal, not to lord over her as an inferior. The original design of God for male and female is for them to express and enjoy equality. The headship of man in the family can only uphold this original intent if it is exercised under the 'law of love.' This implies that the man functions as head in a way that demonstrates his love toward his wife as an equal, that is, by way of mutual submission and shared responsibilities.<sup>73</sup>

On the subject of masculinity, Foster focuses his discussion on power. He sees the desire for and the use of power as man's expressed tendency to control and dominate. Drawing a conclusion from the folly of Adam and Eve, Foster (1985:175) suggests that the sin of power lies in the desire to be more than what human beings are created for, that is, in their

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<sup>72</sup> Achtemeier, Elizabeth 1976. *The Committed Marriage*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

<sup>73</sup> Foster's thinking on the 'law of love' is also reflected in his views on divorce and remarriage. He (Foster 1985:145) comments that under the 'law of love,' divorce is allowable if the continuation of a marriage is substantially more detrimental than a divorce. However, he cautions that divorce should not be a convenient or first option. The exemption clause in support of divorce in Mt 5:32 and 19:9 is not meant to be a legalism, but an expression of the 'law of love.' On the matter of remarriage, Foster (1985:147-48) argues that Jesus is not against remarriage in Mt 5:32; 19:9; Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18 when He says, 'Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.' Rather, Jesus was dealing with male aggressiveness in His time - a divorced woman would be treated like a 'used thing' by a man. Hence, Jesus spoke of remarriage as 'adultery' because of this attitude of contempt with which the man would relate with the divorced woman. In this light, Foster says that when the divorced person is 'substantially better off and the Kingdom of God more effectively advanced by remarriage, then the law of love dictates that remarriage can and even should occur.'

desire to be gods or like God. He (Foster 1985:178) warns that the man who aspires to be his own king and be accountable to no one is especially vulnerable to being corrupted by power. As power is most insidious when coupled with pride, Foster (1985:179-80) encourages men in positions of leadership to 'root themselves deeply in the experiences of ordinary life.' In fact, so convinced of the evil that comes with power is he that Foster (1985:191) calls for a posture of total renunciation - to be 'positionless and possessionless.' Having nothing becomes a man's greatest strength because he has nothing to lose and others can take nothing from him. Foster (1985:215) describes this strength as not of the world and illustrates it this way:

We are so often just like the disciples. We think the position guarantees the power ... The world is full of people who will do anything to get the position so they can have power over others. That is the kind of power that belongs to this world system. It is dependent on human authorisation, and its power is the power to dominate others.

But to the eye of faith positions in the human order themselves are really powerless, ignorant of the way of God and the life of spiritual power. Throughout the book of Acts, we see repeatedly the clash between powerless officials and official-less power.

The authority of Peter, John, and the others was shocking to everyone because they had no human credentials of authority. They had no degrees, no titles of distinction, no human authorisation. Since their ability (power) came from God, human authorisation was irrelevant.

But Foster does have some positive things to say to the man who wields power. He (Foster 1985:207-08, 211, 243) gives some pointers as to how a man can use power to lead/liberate and not dominate/manipulate:

- Use power to promote self-control, not self-indulgence in others. Teach discipline as the language of self-control, that is, do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.
- Use power to promote competence, not feelings of inadequacy in others. Empower and help others to realise their full potential.
- Use power to exercise *servant* leadership. Servant leaders see themselves as servants before they are leaders. This attitude guards against pride and does not despise the ministry of little things.

Hence, Foster believes in power, but only to use it to serve people as human beings and not to dehumanise them. He (Foster 1985:244) describes how a man should use power to serve others this way:

We serve them by a firm refusal to allow them to misuse and abuse us. To allow people to walk over us as one would a doormat is not service, but subservience.

Therefore, if others try to walk over us and take advantage of our serving spirit, we stand up to the abuse. Our concern is not to defend 'our rights,' for we have already given those by God. Firmly, we press others to respect all people - including us - as fully human.

Should a man then find his masculine worth in power? As far as Foster is concerned, the true measure of a man before God is not in his position of power, but in his posture of service. If he has any power at all, he is to use it to promote servanthood in himself, not subservience in others; to empower others to reach their fullest human potential, not to disempower them in dehumanising ways. The pursuit of service is valued more highly than the pursuit of status - this is the 'power' mark of a true man before God.

3.3.2 John Schneider.<sup>74</sup> In an attempt to provoke Christians to rethink about money and possessions, Schneider (1994:55) asserts that human beings are created to live, cultivate, dominate and care for a material world. Moreover, they are created to use and enjoy the fruits of this material world.

While Richard Foster may be greatly embarrassed to equate success in material terms, Schneider (1994:56) has this to say:

But the divine permission, 'You are free to eat from any tree of the garden,' ... conveys the vast, superfluous horizon of freedom for delight that God gave to human beings in the beginning. The whole view is one of almost embarrassingly extravagant delight and excess. God gave them not just the conditions for functional existence, but the conditions for majesty - within limits of course. Genesis presents a challenge to the time-honoured (and somewhat popular)

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<sup>74</sup> John Schneider is professor of theology and chair of the religion department at Calvin College, USA. His thinking on materialism will be used as a response to Foster's view on material success.

Christian tendency to equate enjoyment of the superfluous with greediness and injustice. There is an enjoyment in the superfluous that is very good.

Schneider further adds that the picture of life in Eden before the Fall is an attack on poverty and meagreness. It impresses upon us that abundance, fruitfulness, excess and delight are the divinely determined conditions for a full life.

Though sin has entered into the world, God's covenant with human beings in relation to His other creation on earth still remains. After the Flood in Gn 8:21, God again establishes the ground as His good and sacred creation when he says, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind.' In Gn 9:1, the creation blessing to 'be fruitful and multiply' is given once again by God, and this time to Noah. The Lord also reinstates the dominion of human beings over animals and plants in Gn 9:3.<sup>75</sup> Also, in pronouncing capital punishment as a necessary means of restoring the dignity of human lives in Gn 9:6, God is reaffirming that human beings are bearers of His own image. Hence, Schneider (1994:63-64) concludes that though sin has entered the world, God still wants us to strive for the ideals of the good life which He has first spelt out in Eden.

Moving on to explore the Jubilee practice in Lv 25, Schneider argues that the idea of equal distribution of wealth is alien here. He gives the following reasons:

- The Promised Land was not divided equally among the Israelites. In fact, the Levites were given no land at all.
- The first-born sons were given twice more than the other sons (Dt 21:17), and daughters were given nothing at all.
- On the Day of Jubilee, each was not given according to needs. Many of the poorest got nothing ('e g' aliens, sojourners, non-Israelite debtors and slaves). The rich were not required to sacrifice their luxuries for the poor. In fact, the non-Israelite would be disinherited. Thus, Jubilee restored properties to the original owners, whether they needed them or not.

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<sup>75</sup> This dominion now includes the killing of animals for food.



In the light of this understanding, Schneider (1994:72-73) declares that the 'liberation of people from poverty was not the explicit and driving logic of Jubilee.' He (Schneider 1994:75) sees the movement in Lv 25:18-19 as one from sojourning with the Lord to receiving a life of abundance in the land, and says this pertaining to the Jubilee release:

The purpose of the release was to protect the Israelite families from poverty and to empower them for both lives of redemption action and delight in the abundance of the land.

Schneider also disagrees that the law of tithing in Dt 14:28-29 teaches simpler living for the sake of the poor.<sup>76</sup> He counters that these two verses must be understood in the larger context of Dt 14:22-29. Only then will we see that the picture of delight and blessing in the bounty of the Promised Land. This picture depicts the tithe as something for the feast of thanksgiving; an expression of gratitude and service to God and others. Thus, the tithe has nothing to do with a theology of obligations or simpler living. Rather, it points us back to the ideals of Eden in which God calls human beings to live with an 'immodest passion for the good things in life.' But this passion must be tempered by a concern for the poor because God's good abundance for us is where our 'delight and compassion embrace' (Schneider 1994:78-79). Elaborating, Schneider (1994:81) comments:

The rich are not commanded to give the 'extras' to the poor, but, from their position of power and blessing, they are required to nurture compassion in their hearts and so to institute laws that express the grace of God to the poor.

Turning to Am 6:4-7, Schneider suggests that the moral judgment upon Israel is not against the material enjoyment in a time of hunger. Rather, the judgment is upon a 'demonic narcissism and self-absorption' because the leaders of Israel, in their enjoyment of the good things in life, 'do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.' Their sin here has to do with a lack of grief for the suffering of those so near to them (Schneider 1994:88). Indeed, what the rich

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<sup>76</sup> He is actually responding to Ronald Sider who has written the book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.

need is not to be impoverished, but to be impressed with the concern of God for the less fortunate near them:

The rich must be liberated, not from riches, but from the mind of the serpent. They must have the mind of God, the true Lord, who is their servant. They must strive toward the light of the exodus vision and recover the spirituality of redemptive power, which turns delight instantly to love (Schneider 1994:89).

Moving into the New Testament, Schneider looks at the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Lk 19:1-10. Zacchaeus did not give away all that he possessed, but only half. Though he applied the Old Testament code of justice to himself, he determined his own requirements concerning how much to give. Unlike the rich young ruler who would not face his lack of righteousness, Zacchaeus wanted to come clean before the Lord. In Lk 19:9, the Lord pronounced that salvation had come to him. Zacchaeus was accepted by Jesus not because he became poor in wealth, but poor in spirit (Schneider 1994:135-37).

Commenting on the parable of the rich fool in Lk 12:13-21, Schneider believes that the root problem of this man is not in his possessions in life, but his philosophy of life. Schneider (1994:148-50) insightfully describes this warped philosophy:

The story of the rich fool (in its context) suggests that it was not the creation of financial security nor the retirement and its pleasures that Jesus judged as greedy foolishness. The man's foolishness was rather in his philosophy of life ... We must recall that Jesus aimed the parable primarily at the covetousness of the two brothers. They are thus our point of entry into its primary meaning.

The brothers had lost their father ... But the two brothers were not wise men, they were fools. They squandered the rare moment of grief that could bind them. All they could think about was money. In their craving for security they had lost the real treasure of love. They had gained an inheritance, and lost their souls.

The brothers were not wrong to want an inheritance. They were wrong to 'covet' it, to make it the end of their existence. So with the rich fool ... When his buiding project was through, his *human* project was finished too ... His life ended there, with the barns.

This parable sounds an alarm ... Too easily our productive work becomes an end unto itself - an idol - and financial success brings the strange paradox of poverty in our relationships. The parable reminds us that our relationships are



the real tests of our success. They are the bottom line. They are the real treasure.<sup>77</sup>

Schneider also calls one to view money realistically in this world. He says that as 'money flows through the economic systems of the world, like a river, it will inevitably pick up pollutants along the way.' However, this does not mean that you shun these worldly systems. Rather, it requires that you actively engage them in redemptive uses. Money may not be one's master, but it certainly must be one's servant in bringing release to people. In this way, one serves God. This is what Jesus means when He says in Lk 16:9, 'Use worldly wealth to gain friends' (Schneider 1994:159).<sup>78</sup>

In the parable of the ten pounds in Lk 19:11-27, Schneider hears the call of God to His people to display the courage to be fruitful in the worldly realms of wealth and power. As they so *enlarge* themselves through the creation of wealth and power, they also make their Master and His domain stronger and bigger. Conversely, this parable is a stern warning to those who are timid, thereby becoming fruitless in the economic world (Schneider 1994:161-62).

Unlike Richard Foster, John Schneider looks at material wealth in a very positive way. Taking a journey through the Bible, he argues that it has always been God's design for human beings to enjoy His abundance since Eden. But one must embrace both delight and compassion at the same time, that is, enjoy with an eye on the poor around so that they too can experience

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<sup>77</sup> The absence of meaningful relationships in the life of the rich fool could be detected - Jesus depicted him as a lonely figure who talked to himself.

<sup>78</sup> Espousing a sociological interpretation of this parable, Malina (1981:34) points out that in the first-century Mediterranean world, honour is acquired not through possessions but through benevolence. Thus, money and goods are really means to honour when these are generously given to those in need. Keeping material wealth to oneself is, therefore, frowned upon as a foolish act. Adding further, Malina (1981:77) says:

... the honourable man feels he has a right to fulfil his inherited role, hence a right to economic and social subsistence. The right to subsistence - to the preservation of one's status in all the dimensions of the ideal man's role - is the active moral principle in peasant societies. In other words, the only time our first-century villager or non-elite urbanite will rebel is when his subsistence is taken away. And should this happen, rebellion is not for the purpose of achieving some higher standard of living or some new social status, but only to return to normal subsistence levels.

Hence, in Malina's view, the rich fool in the parable is so described only because in accumulating wealth, he actually brings dishonour upon himself.

God's grace. In provoking a rethink about material wealth, Schneider tries to lead one not into a form of carnal hedonism, but an expression of godly materialism. To him, success becomes stultified if it is restricted to creating and enjoying wealth. Material success must bring a man to a higher level of awareness and action - to grieve and care for the unfortunate near him.

3.3.3 George Knight, III.<sup>79</sup> While Richard Foster tries to downplay the headship of man in the home by stressing much on mutual submission and responsibility between man and woman, Knight is definitely more forceful in his assertion of male headship and female submission. He uses two New Testament texts, Eph 5:21-23 and Col 3:18-19, as the primary basis of his argument for husbands and wives as analogues of Christ and the church.

Knight sees the exhortation to 'submit to one another' in Eph 5:21 as a general call to mutual submission. He points out that Paul uses the middle voice here to stress on what one does to oneself - one submits oneself to others. Knight (1991a:166) further adds that this submission is a 'voluntary yielding in love, characteristic of the Christian community and is urged elsewhere in the New Testament.'

After stating Eph 5:21 as a general principle of mutual submission, Paul then applies it in specific household roles in Eph 5:22-23. However, Knight (1991a:168) notes this significant point as Paul moves from the general to the specific:

It is sometimes urged that mutual submission alone is in view ... Since, however, verse 21 is a transition verse to the entirety of the sections on household responsibilities, consistency would demand that the sections on children and parents and on servants and masters also speak only of mutual submissiveness and not of different roles. Since this is self-evidently not so for the section on children and parents, on the one hand, and masters and servants, on the other, the implication is that distinguishable roles and specific submission are also taught in the section on husbands and wives ... Paul still calls the husband 'the head' of the wife and therefore the one whom she should submit in everything (verses 22-24). Thus this section cannot be teaching only

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<sup>79</sup> George Knight is administrator, dean and professor of New Testament at Knox Theological Seminary. His thinking on marriage and family presented here is based on his two contributions in the book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Knight's view on marriage-family life will be used as a response to Foster's thinking on the same subject.

mutual submission rather than the specific submission of wives to husbands in the overall context of mutual submission.

Knight also claims that the passages in the New Testament that deal with the relationship between the husband and his wife invariably urge the wife to 'submit to' her husband.<sup>80</sup> This submission is based on what God has first designed for man and woman, not on a superior-inferior relationship. Hence, this submission of the wife to her husband is 'an appeal to one who is equal by creation and redemption to submit to the authority God has ordained' (Knight 1991a:168-69).

In discussing the extent of this submission, Knight (1991a:168-70) espouses his thinking as follows:

- This submission rests on the basis that the husband is the 'head' of the wife. Since Paul says that 'the husband is the head of the the wife *as* Christ is head of the church' in Eph 5:23, it is evident that the husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over His church. Hence, Paul is speaking of headship here as authority (leadership), not source. The apostle sees male headship as divine design just as Christ headship over His church is as well.<sup>81</sup>
- As stressed by Paul in Eph 5:22-24, the wife is to submit to her husband 'in everything.' The implicit expectation is that it must not result in disobedience to God. It also does not mean that the wife stops thinking and acting out of her own initiative and creativity. Rather, in her willingness to submit to her husband's headship 'in everything,' she is always desiring to share her thinking and acting with him.

In view of this extent of the wife's submission to her husband, Knight (1991a:171-76) elaborates on what he thinks should be the attitudes of the man as he exercises his headship:

- *The attitude of love:* Paul uses the word *love* six times in Eph 5:25-33 to signify the man's duty to his wife. It is interesting to note that Paul here does not call on the man to be head over his wife, but to love his wife.<sup>82</sup> Paul exhorts the man to love his wife as Christ loves His church (vv 25ff) and as one loves one's own body (v 28). This love also expresses itself in self-giving (v 25), in concern for the other's good (vv 26-27), and in nourishing and cherishing the other person (v 29).

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<sup>80</sup> See Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pt 3:1; Tt 2:4-5. The same verb *hupotasso* is used in all these verses and it is a 'submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.'

<sup>81</sup> See how Paul refers to Gn 2:21-24 in 1 Cor 11:8-9 to point out this divine design of male headship.

<sup>82</sup> Man's role as head over his wife is only addressed by Paul to the woman, *not* to the man, in Eph 5:23.

- *The attitude of respect:* In Col 3:18, the wife is to submit as is 'fitting in the Lord.' This places such a submission as according to what God has first designed at creation, not as a result of the Fall. In other words, this submission affirms the distinguishable roles for man and woman as ordained by God from the very beginning. On the other hand, the headship of the man must not be negative or oppressive if it is to be 'fitting in the Lord' too. As Paul warns in Col 3:19, this headship must be one of respect rather than repression since it is over one who is his equal in creation and redemption, and 'one flesh' with him. Also, Paul alludes to marriage as picturing the eternal relationship between Christ and His church in Eph 5:31-32. This then supports the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife as being rooted in creation and for all time, not just something 'irrelevant and old-fashioned' for our present time and culture.<sup>83</sup>

Knight (1991b:345-46) laments that sin has distorted the design of God for man-woman relationship as evident in the 'spirit of the age' today. In fact, one already reads of this in Gn 3:16 when God says to Eve after the Fall, 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' The man now will seek to dominate in an unloving, oppressive manner ('rule') and the woman will seek to master over her husband ('desire'). All this corrupts the divine design for male headship and female submission in marriage. In spite of this corruption by sin in the husband-wife relationship, Knight (1991b:347-48) urges Christians to keep the following roles in proper perspective:

- *Man as breadwinner and provider:* In Gn 3:17-19, Knight sees God defining the main calling of man as breadwinner and provider for his family. The woman's role is mainly in caring for the children and home (see also Pr 31). Paul also calls on women to 'bear children and keep home' (1 Tm 5:14), and to be 'busy at home' (Tt 2:5).

- *Woman as worker outside the home:* For woman to be 'busy at home' does not mean that she cannot work outside the home. In fact, Pr 31:10-31 depicts a woman who does well by working beyond her domestic chores - she works to care for her children, to support her husband's involvement in the community, and to seek to help the poor and needy (vv 20, 21, 23, 27). However, the woman's first calling in Pr 31 is not to seek her worth by pursuing a career, but to serve her family (vv 28, 29, 31).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Though the master-slave relationship is mentioned together with the husband-wife and parent-child relationships by Paul in Eph 5:22-6:9, it is not because slavery has any permanent moral justification like the other two relationships. Paul is only addressing the master-slave relationship because it fits into the household setting of the day. Hence, each relationship mentioned by Paul in this text must be understood according to how absolute and permanent Paul has intended it to be (Knight 1991a:176-77).

<sup>84</sup> Some guiding questions for a working woman are:



Knight's thinking on marriage-family life can be wrapped up using his own suggestions on how male headship and female submission can be practically worked out in the following areas (Knight 1991b:350-51):

- *Decision-making*: The man must not give up his leadership role at home. But he needs to balance his leadership with honour for his wife as one equal to him in creation and redemption. One way for him to do that is to initiate the search for mutually agreeable decisions with his wife after discussion, prayer and studying the Word. In the absence of a consensus in any matter, the man exercises his leadership by making the decision, and the wife submits to that decision (unless it is intrinsically evil).<sup>85</sup>

- *Caring for children and home*: The direct management of children and the home belongs to the woman (see 1 Tm 5:14 and Pr 31:26-27). However, it must be noted that the husband is also called to 'manage his own household well' (1 Tm 3:4-5), and to be responsible for instructing and overseeing his children (Eph 6:4). What this implies is that the man must not adopt a totally 'hands off' approach in home life. Rather, there should be mutual dependence and cooperation in home life without blurring the distinct roles that God has for husband and wife.<sup>86</sup>

3.3.4 Craig Keener.<sup>87</sup> Keener argues for a socio-cultural reason as to why Paul deals more explicitly with woman submission in Eph 5:18-33. He asserts that there was a general mistrust of eastern cults, 'e g' the cult of Cybele and the cult of Isis, reflected in ancient Roman literature. Keener (1992:139) writes:

The Roman aristocracy felt that their power base increasingly threatened by social changes occurring around them. These changes included the upward mobility of socially inferior elements, such as former slaves, foreigners, and

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- Is it really beneficial to her family when she works outside the home?
  - Does working outside the home help her husband in his calling from God?
  - Does working outside the home bring good to others?
  - Can she work outside the home without neglecting her primary calling as wife and mother?

<sup>85</sup> For example, in matters related to work outside the home, it must be remembered that the man's work should take precedence over the wife's since his primary calling is to be provider and that of the wife is to be homemaker. Thus, when necessary, the man must decide that his wife stops work to care for the home, and she must be willing to submit to that decision.

<sup>86</sup> Knight (1991b:351) has this to say pertaining to the primary roles of husband and wife:

The direct care and supervision of the children is the specific calling of the wife/mother ... It would be unnatural in the normal family setting for the husband/father to assume this task and to surrender the task of 'breadwinning' to his wife. This is not to say that he is not to be as concerned and as involved in the training of their children as she is, but rather that he does so in correlation with his responsibility as the primary provider.

<sup>87</sup> Craig Keener is professor of New Testament at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

women. Foreign religions were sometimes suspected of aiding what the aristocrats viewed as a subversion of the appropriate moral order.

Hence, it is not too far-fetched to surmise that the Roman elite would also have viewed Christianity as some kind of a foreign superstition that could subvert the morality of Roman women. Quoting a story by the ancient historian, Josephus, as to how a Jewish man had tricked a Roman woman to part with her money, Keener relates how this resulted in hostile feelings toward Christians - the wrath of Emperor Tiberius was aroused and he ordered all Jews to be banished from Rome. Henceforth, Christianity was regarded as a subversive, Judaistic cult in the Roman world (Keener 1992:141).

Keener (1992:142) also suggests that there was a great willingness for women in the Roman world to convert to Christianity. This 'turning of a wife from her husband's religion was viewed as an especially subversive ploy on the part of foreign religions.' Consequently, increased hostility toward Christians was aroused. Paul did not want the church to be viewed as an immoral cult, threatening the stability of families in the Roman Empire. Hence, he wrote Eph 5:18-33 with emphasis on wife's submission in order to quell anti-Christian sentiments in the Roman world.

The new freedom in Jesus Christ which Christianity advocated was also viewed as a threat to the Roman upper class. This elite group regarded such a teaching as a subversive attempt to change the socially accepted positions of slaves and women in the family. Keener (1992:145-46) observes this after studying various 'household codes' in ancient Roman and Jewish writings:

The family was held to be the basic unit upon which society was built ... Groups accused of undermining the moral fabric of Roman society thus sometimes protested that they instead conformed to traditional Roman values, by producing their own lists, or 'household codes,' fitting those normally used in their day.

It was likewise natural for Greek-speaking Jewish writers to dwell on the proper ways to act in various relationships. To the extent that they needed to

demonstrate their lack of subversiveness to Roman society, their use of household codes became all the more important. If they could demonstrate the 'orthodox' character of their family practices, they would have answered a critical charge levelled against them by powerful members of the surrounding society.

Thus, Keener (1992:147) concludes that Paul wrote Eph 5:18-33 to defend Christianity as a teaching that respected the cultural values and norms of the Roman world. He emphasised wife's submission in the text since it was an essential part of Christian witness in the then dominant Greco-Roman culture.<sup>88</sup> Paul was strategically appealing to the powerbrokers so that Roman hostility toward Christians might be reduced. His 'household codes' in Eph 5:18-33 were written as a 'long-range response to basic Roman cultural objections to the gospel' pertaining to the position of women, especially in the family.<sup>89</sup>

What Keener has suggested is somewhat akin to the experiences of some Christians in Singapore, especially those from ethnic Chinese families. He says that the Romans had misunderstood the freedom that Christians enjoyed in Christ, and thus, had mistakenly branded them as 'subversive' to established family structures and traditions. He further suggests that Paul deliberately emphasised wife's submission in Eph 5:18-23 so as to correct this mistaken notion about Christians; to argue that Christianity was really pro-family, not anti-family.

Singapore is a secular country in which Christianity is one of the many religions, but not the major one in terms of numbers. However, Christians have contributed significantly in the areas of economics, government and social concerns. They do not have problem being accepted at the public, societal level. But at the private, family level, some ethnic Chinese Christians have been labelled 'anti-family' like the Christians in Paul's time as suggested by Keener. They are from homes where other family members, especially the parents who belong

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<sup>88</sup> Carolyn Osiek (Jan/1996:2) of Catholic Theological Union concurred that this was in line with 'Hellenistic teaching and Roman sensibilities about the ordering of domestic life as model for public life.'

<sup>89</sup> Though individual members were free to have their own faith alongside that of the family, the exclusive claims of Christianity must have brought about much tension in the family, especially when the wife of a non-Christian man became a Christian (Osiek Jan/1996:15).

to the older generation, are not Christians. These older ones would brand Christianity as a Western religion since they view it as the faith of the white people, and by implication, not congruent to Chinese values.

Chinese values have a high regard for honouring one's parents. So do the teachings of the Bible. But there is one main reason why Christianity is mistakenly viewed as anti-family in some ethnic Chinese homes. In Chinese folk religion, there is a practice called ancestral worship. In this practice, dead ancestors are revered and worshipped. Such reverence and worship of the dead is closely intertwined with respect and honour for them. But while Christians have no problem respecting and honouring the dead for their lives and contributions, they cannot revere and worship them. They can only revere and worship God.

This position immediately clashes with an important tradition in ancestral worship, which is the offering of incense sticks to the dead at the family altar. Since this is not only an act of respect/honour, but also of reverence/worship, Christians would rightly refuse to comply with this traditional ritual in the family. Unfortunately, this refusal has offended other members in the family who charge Christians for lacking the virtue of doing good to their ancestors. Thus, they are being labelled 'anti-family' since they refuse to observe this important family tradition.

When Keener suggests that Paul emphasises wife's submission in Eph 5:18-23 to argue that Christians are really pro-family, it is akin to what some Chinese Christians in Singapore have tried to do. For example, instead of offering incense sticks to the ancestors, they would show their respect by observing a moment of silence at the altar. Another example is that of a home where the Christian has the power to make decisions in the family (such as the eldest son who takes over when the father has died) - this person may decide to replace the ancestral tablet on the family altar where the dead is worshipped with a photograph of the dead and a

plaque with Bible verses. This substitute can go a long way in reassuring the non-Christians in the family that the dead is still fondly respected and remembered though not worshipped; that Christianity is really not anti-family.

3.3.5 Leo Perdue.<sup>90</sup> Like Keener, Perdue also believes that biblical texts will be better understood when we study them with sensitivity to the related socio-cultural contexts. Both believe in going behind the foreground of the text in order to better understand the mind of the biblical writer.<sup>91</sup>

Perdue (1997a:163) points out that family life in Israel had been directly and indirectly impacted by other cultures, namely, that of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan and the Hellenistic world.

Three features have been highlighted by Perdue (1997a:166-67) as major characteristics of family life in ancient Israel and early Judaism:

- *Household as family*. The family was multigenerational with two or more households, related by kinship and marriage, living together in a housing complex. Also, family structures were patrilineal (sons perpetuate the family line), patrilocal (woman married into man's family), and patriarchal (man as head).<sup>92</sup>

- *Household members as economic contributors*. All members were expected to provide the needed labour for the survival of not only the household concerned, but of the whole family chain as well. The family that we know of in ancient Israel and early Judaism belongs largely to the rural, agrarian kind.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Leo Perdue is professor of Hebrew Bible and dean of Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University.

<sup>91</sup> In Keener's case, he may have imposed too much deductions and implicit evidences into his interpretation of Eph 5:18-23 as he tries to reconstruct the scenario based on his research into the background of the New Testament world.

<sup>92</sup> Osiek (Jan/1996:11) says the same about the family in the days of early Christianity:

Households and family units included children, slaves, unmarried relatives, and often freedmen and freedwomen or other renters of shop or residential property ... Household ownership and management was not restricted to a single nuclear group and its dependencies; there are known examples of houses owned and occupied by brothers ... each with his own dependents. Women headed households, too, both singly and with other women. Therefore, it would seem that, in spite of the strictly patriarchal legal structure of families, there was a great deal of variety in the composition of actual households ....

<sup>93</sup> Land was very important to the family because without it, the family could not exist as an entity and the household could not survive. Naturally, work and other aspects of family life were largely centred on activities in the land(fields) and in the household itself (Perdue 1997a:169-70).

- *Household solidarity.* Members relate to one another interdependently for the purpose of survival and continuity. Hence, group interest often preceded individual interest. This spirit of solidarity also embraced one's clans or tribes in order to impart a wider sense of community.

Gender roles in the family of ancient Israel and early Judaism can be generally specified in the following ways:

- *Males:* Their functional roles would include procreation, agricultural labour, education, judicial decisions, religious instruction and practice, and protection. The father exercised headship over the family till his death or he became physically/mentally incapable. Thus, even married sons and their families were to submit to the father's authority (Perdue 1997a:180).<sup>94</sup>

- *Females:* Women were to submit themselves to men primarily as wives and daughters. However, women in biblical and early Jewish literature did demonstrate great influence over men, especially in the area of the home (see Pr 31:10-31). The woman was the one who would produce children to work and to be heirs. 'The mother's own economic tasks, beyond providing care, were necessary for family survival. She managed the household and loved and cared for her husband and children.' Hence, tradition and law required that she be respected and obeyed (see Pr 19:26; 20:20; Ex 20:12; Lv 19:3; Sir 3:1-16) [Perdue 1997a:181-82].

Perdue cautions that we must be aware of the limits of social history when using the Old Testament to explain family life for today. He (Perdue 1997b:244) said:

Yet to examine what the Hebrew Bible has to say about the family to contemporary, believing communities does not mean that an exegesis of biblical passages dealing with the household can lead directly to the formulation of absolutist, propositional, moralistic truths from scripture ....<sup>95</sup>

In order to judiciously use the Old Testament theology of the family for today, Perdue (1997b:250-51) lists out three assumptions:

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<sup>94</sup> Children were expected to honour their parents not only in terms of obeying them, but also caring for them in their old age and providing them with a proper burial at death (Perdue 1997a:190).

<sup>95</sup> The social history of Israelite and Jewish family life is limited because: the portrayal of the family as one knows it is incomplete; the family in Israelite and Jewish culture was dynamic and not static. Hence, it is unwise to understand the Israelite and Jewish family in the Bible by removing it from the socio-cultural moorings of its past.



- *A reconstruction of the social history of the family must first be done.* This is because the family in ancient Israel and early Judaism had gone through significant changes over a period of some 1 200 years.<sup>96</sup>

- *An accommodation of these social understandings within a larger framework of Old Testament theology and ethics must be done.* Specifically, the family must be interpreted and understood in the wider theological context of covenant and obligation.<sup>97</sup>

- *A critical evaluation of the Old Testament's description of the household must first be done before applying it to define the present.* One reason for this is that the socio-economic world today is so radically different from that of ancient Israel and early Judaism. The family then was largely placed in a rural, agricultural context, but the family today has been greatly impacted by industrialisation and technology.<sup>98</sup>

In a nutshell, to better understand and apply the biblical teachings on the family for today, Perdue issues a call to exegete not merely the biblical text, but more importantly, to exegete the biblical text in the context of its socio-cultural world.

3.3.6 Rob Palkovitz.<sup>99</sup> Changes in the culture of fatherhood in America can be traced over four historical stages. Palkovitz (1996:313-16) outlines these periods as:

- *Colonial:* During this period, fathers acted as advisors and instructors in the bringing up and education of children. They were also the providers of material needs, controllers of properties, and even executors of veto power in matters of courtship and marriage. Fathers then were vested with great responsibilities and exercised great influence on children.

- *Industrial Age:* During this period, fathers invested much of their time and energy away from home. Hence, mothers became the key parent, but man was still 'head' by virtue of his role as the primary provider. In fact, 'being fully a

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<sup>96</sup> Perdue believes that these changes came about largely out of practical necessity. He (Perdue 1997a:177) said: 'Perhaps it is best to say that the household in ancient Israel and early Judaism was both a pragmatic necessity and a traditional form that still allowed for some variations.'

<sup>97</sup> In the New Testament, some of Jesus' teachings seem to undermine family values for the sake of the gospel. For example, He taught His disciples to ignore the sacred duty of burying a dead father (Lk 9:59-60), to forget about looking back and saying farewell to one's family (Lk 9:61), and even to hate their family members (Lk 14:25-26). But all these radical teachings must be understood in the context of Jesus' new covenant with His disciples and their obligation to Him as their Lord - the cost of discipleship might sometimes demand that they must choose against family in order to be loyal to the Lord. In such times, they had to stand with and for one another as members of the Lord's family. Indeed, the 'boundaries of kinship are not removed but reset ... not so much by blood or social structures as by Baptism and Eucharist' (Osiek Jan/1996:22-23).

<sup>98</sup> Also, unlike today, the idea of the home as a place of privacy was alien to the function of the home in the days of early Christianity. In fact, the home then was not a refuge from work, but rather, it was an important place of commerce and hospitality (Osiek Jan/1996:12).

<sup>99</sup> Rob Palkovitz is associate professor of family studies at the University of Delaware.



father meant being separated from one's children for a considerable part of each working day.'

- *Twentieth Century*: The image of the father as provider of the family was even stronger during this time. Work took priority over family. It is said that as far as men were concerned then, 'success in the good provider role came to define masculinity itself.'

- *Contemporary*: Besides his role as provider, man today is called to be involved and to participate actively in family life. This new style of fatherhood has been termed 'androgynous fatherhood'. The androgynous father involves himself in a more intimate and expressive way with his children. He minimises the distinctions between fatherhood and motherhood, and those between sons and daughters.<sup>100</sup>

But there are many barriers to the androgynous style of fatherhood today. Palkovitz

(1996:318-20) points out some of them:

- *Sense of incompetence*: Such feelings in caregiving inhibit the man from involvement because of the fear of failure. This in turn brings on a vicious cycle in that less involvement results in even less competence.

- *Gender socialisation*: Traditional masculinity has to do with being strong, independent, competitive, emotionally restrained and achievement-oriented. All these features are very much opposed to many aspects of involved parenting. For the man, to suppress these masculine features is to risk being ridiculed by one's male peers.

- *Work-family tension*: It is never easy to balance the demands of work and family. Many men choose to lean more toward their work because they want to provide well for their family members. Also, late marriages, which are common today, have resulted in many men becoming fathers at a time when they are trying hard to establish their career.

- *Cost-benefits considerations*: To spend more time with the family may require the man to work less outside the home. This reduction in working time may affect the economic and social standing of the family. Hence, involved parenting on the part of the man often depends on the values and aspirations of his family, especially if he is the primary provider.

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<sup>100</sup> Max Stackhouse (1997:68), professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, has this to say about the contemporary female mindset:

Women increasingly feel themselves to have callings in at least two covenanted communities: They want to be loving wives and mothers in the family and to be responsible producers and earners in the public world of work.

As work outside the home changed, work at home changed as well ... the adults living in the household shared a remarkable number of the tasks. While some things were differentiated by gender ... many tasks were gender-neutral ....



In the light of all these barriers, Palkovitz is of the opinion that though the culture of fatherhood has undergone changes over the years, the conduct of fatherhood remains very much the same. Though the contemporary context may call for androgynous fatherhood, the typical father today is still very much like the traditional father of old. In fact, Palkovitz (1996:320) comments that it is difficult to state with certainty at this point that more paternal involvement will indeed result in stronger homes.

To solve the injustices in family role divisions today, Palkovitz suggests the need to go beyond a superficial adjustment to the culture of fatherhood. He stresses that a deep-seated transformation in man and woman is needed whereby each can truly appreciate who he/she is before God. Only then can a person relate to God and others out of love - he/she obeys God not as keepers of God's laws, but as lovers after God's heart. When such a transformation takes place, 'people no longer need to focus on equity ... because by God's grace they are able to walk a truly other-centred, loving life' (Palkovitz 1996:324-25).

3.3.7 David Seamands.<sup>101</sup> Richard Foster has pointed out that man has this tendency to find his masculine worth in power. He further comments that this use of power should be directed at serving others rather than being served by others. He calls this the power of servanthood, not of status. But while Foster sees servanthood as a positive expression of power, Seamands cautions that all this doing good for others can lead to something negative - falling into the performance trap. From a counsellor's perspective, he leads one to see how a

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In fact, Stackhouse (1997:69) comments that, unlike the preindustrial days, it is now difficult to insist that man works outside ('e g' harvesting the fields) and woman works at home ('e g' cooking in the kitchen) based on biological and physical attributes. Technology today has made men more capable at domestic chores and women more capable at corporation work. And with the rise of dual-income families in America and the availability of professionalised caregiving sanctioned by government, Stackhouse (1997:74) sounds out this timely caution: 'The stewardship and guidance of the parent-child relationship and the modelling and intimacy it involves are not subject to the ordinary laws of political economy.'

<sup>101</sup> David Seamands is a former missionary and pastor. He is now professor of pastoral ministries at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. In this discussion on masculinity, his thinking will be used to respond to Foster's exhortation for men to value servanthood more than power.

performance-based life is often opposed to divine grace. Seamands (1991:28) claims that the performance orientation in many Christians is because they only believe in a theology of grace, but not live it out.

Identifying the barriers to grace in the lives of many Christians, Seamands (1991:31-33) points a finger at the following cultural trends:<sup>102</sup>

- *Self-reliance*: This is the tendency to brag about one's independence and freedom from the need to be helped by others.<sup>103</sup>

- *Individualism*: This encourages one to 'do your own thing.' Even religion is seen as just a way to discover and realise oneself, and not to experience God's grace and extend it to others as well.

- *Activism*: This stems from the spirit of optimism today which promises that 'you can do/be/get anything you really want to if you work hard enough.' Great performances, like good works and servanthood, are seen as the reasons why we are loved and accepted by God. This view is obviously opposed to the idea of divine grace which defines that all our doing should be responses to, rather than reasons for, our being loved and accepted by God.

The contemporary church is also not spared when Seamands (1991;35-38) charges it for preaching three 'false gospels':

- *Gospel of success*: A successful church today is often measured in terms of the size of its facilities, the amount of its annual budget and the numbers of people in attendance. The bigger these figures are, the more successful the church is deemed to be. Also, victorious Christian living is dependent on how actively or how well one performs in church ministries. Divorced people who suffer from broken marriages and elderly folks who cannot be more participative in church life are often marginalised as 'failures.'

- *Gospel of individualism*: The lack of a genuine atmosphere for meaningful relationships in the church has caused many to be hesitant to be known by others. The fear to share problems and weaknesses has resulted in many hurting people putting up an artificial and superficial front in church.

- *Gospel of legalism*: The heavy emphasis in contemporary preaching on keeping rules and laws has sent mixed messages of unconditional love and performance-based acceptance. These confusing messages have caused many

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<sup>102</sup> Though he is talking of the situation in American society, this writer can detect the same ills in the Singapore context.

<sup>103</sup> Seamands (1991:32) says this of the self-reliant spirit: 'The ideal of self-sufficiency ... causes many Christians to take the very means of grace and put them on the performance treadmill.'

to be frustrated because they do not feel being approved by God in spite of all their doing.

Seamands traces this bent toward performance-based acceptance way back to Eden in Gn 3:4. There, Adam and Eve refused to accept their human limitations. They wanted to be like God and be His equal. Seamands (1991:61) describes their folly this way:

But they tried to be *like* God, they not only failed to become *more* than they were, but actually became *less*. They could not achieve the glory and perfection that belongs only to God. Instead, they lost the only kind of perfection they had - a gift granted to them, as beings created in God's likeness.

Thus, man faced the disapproval of God at that point in creation history. And since then, being performance-oriented (perfectionistic) has signified his desperate attempt to regain his lost sense of approval before God and others. This desperate attempt to gain acceptance has resulted in what Seamands terms as a 'superself' image in man. This 'superself' image is characterised by three needs (Seamands 1991:99-102):

- *Need to be perfect*: The person tries harder and harder to please in order to secure love and acceptance from others. But he is never satisfied with his own performances, resulting in him always trying to live up to the demands of that 'superself' in him.

- *Need for a scapegoat*: In order to protect his perfect 'superself' image, the person has to shift blame on someone or something else. This often proves detrimental to relationships in his life.

- *Need to prove oneself*: This is the result of much anger and resentment in the person. His real need is not to be accepted by others by proving himself with a vengeance, but to forgive himself and others, and to experience the forgiveness of God. In other words, he must accept and develop his real self, and not try to show a false self of superiority/success.

Drawing from his own experience in counselling, Seamands concludes that many people suffer from low self-esteem because they engage in a 'comparison game which puts the stress on doing.' Their sense of worthlessness is the result of feeling that they have lost to others in this comparison game. Hence, a man with low self-esteem will say to himself, 'I am worthless and unacceptable and the things I do just reveal to others what I really am.' This is

tragic because it is not just a self-attack on his doing, but also on his being as a person (Seamands 1991:158).

Seamands draws attention to the fact that the sense of low self-esteem comes from within the person. Hence, it is futile to try and solve it with something external, like affirmation and recognition from others. Seamands (1991:161-62) prescribes healing grace, not better performances, as the cure for damaged self-esteem. He calls on the person to face up to the pain in him and his own reactions to it; to come to a deeper level of openness and honesty with God and himself concerning that pain. Seamands suggests that the worst pain be remembered, be relived, and most of all, be relinquished to God in forgiving, surrendering prayer for '*when God saw us at our worst, He loved us the most.*'<sup>104</sup>

Basing on his own experience in counselling, David Seamands (1991:160) thinks that men are more performance-oriented than women. And many Christian men who seek to serve and do good to others have fallen into the performance trap. Seamands calls them not to exercise their masculinity by restlessly trying to prove their worth, but to rest in the worth already given them by divine grace. The man who pleases God is not merely one who performs well, but more importantly, he is one who has experienced profoundly that God has already accepted him by His grace. Thus, this man does things, and does them well, because he wants to express his gratitude to God and to extend His grace to others as well.

### 3.4 Chapter Summary

The insights and views presented in this chapter on success, marriage-family life and masculinity are not meant to be an exhaustive expression of the normative Christian traditions. Rather, they are drawn from various sources to give a cumulative Christian understanding of these topics.

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<sup>104</sup> The feelings associated with the pain can be shared either alone with God or with someone else.



**3.4.1 A cumulative Christian understanding of success.** The salient assertions are:

- Success is to be and do one's best with all the opportunities that God has given. In the process, one is deemed successful when he/she has allowed God to be the leader and guide in all his/her being and doing.

- Success is also more than just being and doing well in material terms. It has to do with achieving the goals that God has for one materially, spiritually and morally. Indeed, success is not just the attainment of material blessings, but also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in one's world of abundance and opportunities. Material gains are not success if they are the fruits of greed and dishonesty. On the other hand, the honest and diligent worker receives the reward he deserves without shame, and should not even shortchange himself unfairly in material terms.

- The danger of material success is that it can lead to self-indulgence of the body. But the wellness of man's soul (immaterial) is more important than that of his body (material). In fact, money is not neutral as it has the power to be demonic in character and become a rival god. When this happens, the trust in God's sufficiency is replaced by the fear of material deficiency.

- Though material wealth brings with it a host of temptations, it is not to be despised because human beings are created to use and enjoy the fruits of this material world. The picture of life in Eden before the Fall is an attack on poverty and meagreness. It impresses upon us that abundance, fruitfulness, excess and delight are the divinely determined conditions for a full life. And in the observance of the Jubilee in the Old Testament, 'liberation of people from poverty was not the explicit and driving logic.' In fact, some of the poorest got nothing on the Day of Jubilee. In actuality, this observance symbolised the receiving of a life of abundance in the Promised Land. It was a time to keep and enjoy one's material blessings without shame and guilt. In Lk 19:9, Zacchaeus did not give up all his wealth yet he found acceptance in the Lord. Indeed, acceptance in the Lord is not to become 'poor in wealth,' but 'poor in spirit' as one realises his lack of righteousness before the Lord.

- Another example of 'godly materialism' is found in 'The Parable of the 10 Pounds' (Lk 19:11-27) which challenges one to be fruitful and successful in the worldly realms of wealth and power. Through these two means, one can advance God's Kingdom as he/she advances himself/herself. Material success must bring one to a higher level of awareness and action - to grieve and care for the unfortunate near him/her. The rich fool in Lk 12:13-21 was faulted not because of his possessions in life, but his philosophy of life. He made material success as his ultimate end and became poor in relationships. Hence, relationships are a person's bottomline and the real tests of his/her success.

- The belief that 'one would be contented if only there was a little more' is a myth because genuine contentment is rooted in relationships, not things. Hence, people are to be happy with what they already have materially. As far as God's perspective is concerned, success is not always having one's desires for things



as counterparts on the same side, not as competitors on opposing sides. Man and his wife are not to walk behind each other for there is nothing to hide from each other; they are not to walk ahead of each other for there is nothing to run from each other. But they are to walk beside each other because they are to stand by each other 'as long as they both live.'

- The headship of the man over his wife is one of authority as ordained by God, and not as a result of the Fall. And this authority is to be exercised with love and respect because it is over one who is man's equal in creation and redemption, and 'one flesh' with him. He seeks to reach mutually agreeable decisions with his wife, but in the absence of a consensus, he exercises his headship by making a decision, and the wife submits to it (unless it is intrinsically evil). The wife's submission to her husband does not mean that she stops thinking and acting out of her own initiative and creativity. Rather, in her willingness to submit to her husband 'in everything,' she is always desiring to share her thinking and acting with him. Just as Christ's headship over His church is for all time, man's headship over his wife is also for all time here on earth.

- In their relationships with their children, man and wife must remember that they are to be parents worthy of obedience and honour. They are not to provoke their children to anger or induce resentment in them with their words and actions. Also, worthy parents take the development of their children seriously. They do this by means of reproof, advice, encouragement and personal example. Disciplining and modelling are two great services a parent can render to his/her child. Indeed, it is in the home, not the church, that Christian education for children begins and continues.

- Worthy parents also maintain in focus their primary calling from God. For the man, his primary calling is that of breadwinner and provider (Gn 3:17-19). However, he is also called to 'manage his own household well' (1 Tm 3:4-5), and to be responsible for instructing and overseeing his children (Eph 6:4). This implies that the man must not be so engrossed in work life that he adopts a totally 'hands off' approach in home life. For the woman, her primary calling is to care for the children and the home (Pr 31:26-27; 1 Tm 5:14; Tt 2:5). But this does not mean that she cannot work outside the home, especially if this involvement can genuinely benefit her family and others without undermining her primary calling to the home (Pr 31:10-31).

- There should be mutual dependence and cooperation in home life without blurring the distinct roles of headship and submission that God has ordained for husband and wife respectively. However, care must be taken when using Scripture to argue for these role distinctions as they may only be so because of the socio-cultural setting during a particular period in biblical history. Hence, the reason for such distinctions may be to reflect the identity of God's people in a positive way. Simply put, these distinctions may be just descriptive of desired/existing Israelite, Jewish or Christian home life at a time in biblical history, rather than prescriptive for all times. In the final analysis, man and woman need to observe their roles at home not as keepers of God's laws, but



servanthood. And as far as Jesus is concerned, a man actually diminishes himself when he focuses on self-elevation and forgets about servanthood.

- *Man of esteem by grace:* A low self-esteem comes from within the person. Hence, it is futile to try and solve it with something external, like affirmation and recognition from others. The cure for damaged self-esteem is to be found in God's healing grace, not in better performances or louder applauses. Grace calls the hurting man to face up to the pain in him and his own reactions to it, to come to a deeper level of openness and honesty with God and himself, and then to relinquish that pain to God in forgiving, surrendering prayer. Indeed, the performance-oriented man is exhorted not to work himself restlessly to prove his worth, but to restfully accept that worth is already given him by God's grace.

This cumulative Christian understanding of success, marriage-family life and masculinity will serve as a reference for the next chapter in which an attempt will be made to dialogue with secular thinking on the same subjects.