

## Holding the Ends Together Against the Middle

By Paul R. Blake

The title is clearly a declaration of desperation. It describes the state one finds himself in which everything seems to be falling apart when whatever it was that held it together is gone. One then holds the ends tightly against the middle in the hope that the whole will stand together. But with nothing to bind the separate pieces together, it will eventually fall apart.

This is especially true of the family. In the beginning, God created man, and instead of giving him ten friends to satisfy his need for companionship, He instead gave the man a wife. Not long after receiving a wife, the man was blessed with children. Thus we find that the family was designed and built by God, and all that God does is good. God purposed that the family be a stable institution, that the husband and wife are to remain together for a lifetime, and that the children would have certain obligations to the family, even after "leaving the nest." The cement that God used to hold the family together is composed of a blend of love and law.

A man is to love his wife as strongly as Christ loves the Church. He is to take responsibility for the raising of his children and see to their spiritual, physical, social, and emotional needs. The woman is to love and respect her husband, and she is to care deeply for her children. Her love for her husband is a stabilizing influence on him. Her love for her children is the food their souls feed on to become loving adults themselves. The love the husband has for his wife and for his children is the motivating power that leads him to be the provider and protector of those who are more vulnerable than he. In an environment like this, the children cannot help learning to both care for and be responsible for others. When Dad and Mom are aged and need to be nurtured, the children return the parent's love by helping them in their infirmity. And folks, when love for God and His word is added to this mixture, there is no force on the earth that can undermine or damage the family.

However, just as the mighty oak is impervious to external enemies yet it can deteriorate from within, so the family can fall apart due to internal decay. A number of forces within the family serve to weaken it until one must hold the ends against the middle to keep it intact. For example, the ease with which so many choose to divorce poisons love and commitment. People who move often or move to a great distance from other family members strain the family fabric. People who work too long at the expense of quantity family time lose touch with each other and lose love and a sense of personal involvement as well. The same is true of those who play too much. Individual recreational activities are fun, but they should never cut into family activity time. Parents who pay others to raise their children tear down the family structure for that generation.

Aside from correcting the above problems, there are other ways to re-bond and re-cement our families back together. Consider the following:

- 1) Take your children to church services every time. Begin with what is important and never vary from it. I have witnessed far too many misguided parents emphasize education, school and community sports, and part time jobs over worship services and Bible classes, and then when the children leave home the parents wonder why their children abandon the church. Start with what is important and never vary from it!

2) Each family member must be taught to work to increase the value of the family name. One's name is an inheritance from his father. Don't just protect it, build on it and teach your children to do the same.

3) Never allow anyone in the family to become a loner. Find a way to include everyone in as many family activities as possible. Even those embarrassed teenagers who wouldn't be caught dead in the family station wagon can be taught to have fun with the rest of the group.

4) Keep in contact with distant family members. Instead of a new boat or set of patio furniture, spend the money on letters, phone calls, and trips to visit each other. Maintain ties.

5) Never attempt to purchase a child's love or cooperation. God decreed that we use His disciplinary plan in His word. No human organization will ever devise a better way to raise good, healthy children.

6) Respect aged persons and teach your children to do the same. A culture that mistreats the elderly is a culture that will soon fall, and deservedly so. God commands it; respect for the aged is a foundation pillar of goodness and quality.

7) Learn to both accept and delegate responsibility. As your capacity increases, so should your willingness to take on more responsibility. But, know your limits as a parent. Your children need to learn responsibility as well. It will not hurt Junior to wash dishes, clean his room, or mow the yard. Sis will not be emotionally crippled if she has to fold laundry, sweep the kitchen, or carry out the trash. Jeremiah said that it is good for the young to learn how to work while they are young.

8) Look out for each other. I do not mean tell the teacher off when she gives your child some needed disciplinary action. I mean protect each other. Be aware when someone in the family is hurting or in need. Be alert to each other's weakness, and stand up for them when someone treats them unfairly.

We need not desperately fight a losing battle to hold our beloved family members together. The family that is crumbling can be held intact, yes even put back together better than before, if we use God's glue -- love and law.

## A Moments Wisdom

The devil is never too busy to rock the cradle of a sleeping saint.

If you aren't big enough for criticism, you are too small for praise.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Some folks look ahead, some look back, but most folks look confused.

A bitter world cannot be sweetened by sour religion.

Nothing is harder for most people to see than the obvious.

The best inheritance parents can give their children is a couple of hours of their day.

Recall it as often as you wish; a happy memory never wears out.

We like a man who comes right out and says what he thinks, especially when he agrees with us.

Trust is a tie that holds friendship together.

Life is too hard to trust no one.

If you're looking for a helping hand, it's probably at the end of your own arm.

There are only three ages of man: youth, middle age, and "you're looking well."