

WEAPONS THE DEVIL IS USING – CRIPPLED FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

- A. PR 11:29.
1. A good deal of the pain in our culture is the consequence of relational breakdown in the family.
 2. How many different problems in American society could you list that are related to the family?
 3. There are so many that even a partial list is very disturbing.
- B. We hear a good deal nowadays about “dysfunctional” families. What are these?
1. A dysfunction is a “disordered or impaired functioning of a bodily system or organ” (*American Heritage Dictionary*).
 2. Comparing the family to a human body, we can say that a dysfunctional family has one or more systems that are not working right: the family is impaired, crippled, or handicapped by one or more problems that keep it from functioning as it was intended to function and providing the benefits it was intended to provide to its members.
- C. “Crippled families” are not just those that are completely dysfunctional; they are those that have even a single system that is impaired.
- D. What does it say about the times in which we live that when we encounter an “ordinary” family (one that is simply functioning as families were meant to function) the experience is so refreshing to us?
- E. Family problems, of course, are problems in and of themselves; they very frequently involve things that are inherently sinful, and these sins involve a great deal of suffering.
- F. But this is not a study of family problems in general. We want to look at the crippling of our families as a tactic the devil is using to undermine the cause of the Lord’s kingdom.
- G. Let’s look at how various dysfunctions in our family relationships are hindering both our relationship with God and our work in the church.

DISCUSSION

I. WHAT SOME OF OUR FAMILY-RELATED PROBLEMS ARE

- A. In regard to the husband-wife relationship.
1. The problem of marital infidelity.
 - a. Is there any more heartbreaking problem among the Lord’s people today than the frequency of sexual unfaithfulness to the marriage vow? Did we not mean what we said when we vowed to our mates that they could trust us?
 - b. Do we not honor the *covenant* involved in marriage?
 - c. PR 2:17; ML 2:13-14.
 2. The problem of divorce and remarriage.
 - a. We have a host of problems related to the prevalence of divorce and remarriage itself.
 - (1) The prevalence of unlawful divorce cannot be anything but utterly repugnant to the God who instituted marriage.
 - (2) ML 2:16.
 - b. As if that were not enough, however, we have a number of problems related to divisiveness over scriptural teaching *about* divorce and remarriage.
 - c. Consider just some of the characteristics of the divorce and remarriage problem.

- (1) It is widespread. By now, almost every family and congregation has been touched by the pain of this issue in some way.
 - (2) It is complex.
 - (a) Some of the marriage problems people can get themselves tangled up in are hard to unravel. If the devil were to try to think up the very worst kind of problem with which to trouble the Lord's people in our age, he would be hard put to devise one that packs a more powerful punch in more different ways than that of divorce and remarriage. Satan is crafty indeed. The lack of any real intimacy in so many marriages among the Lord's people is a problem of alarming proportions.
 - (b) Some of the errors that are taught on divorce and remarriage are hard to decipher.
 - (3) It is controversial, divisive.
 - (a) This is an issue about which sincere brethren of much ability and influence have serious disagreements.
 - (b) Ill feelings and alienation threaten to become more common.
 - (c) Regional differences make the problem worse.
 - (4) It is difficult in regard to fellowship.
 - (a) What do we do when there is reason to believe that someone in the local congregation is involved in an unscriptural marriage?
 - (b) What do we do when we do not know whether someone who wishes to place membership is scripturally married?
 - (c) What do we do when members within the congregation disagree about fundamental aspects of the divorce and remarriage question?
 - (d) Do we use preachers for gospel meetings who take unscriptural positions on divorce and remarriage?
 - (5) It is *difficult in regard to evangelism*. What do we do when we find out someone we are studying the gospel with is unscripturally married?
 - (6) It is *emotionally sensitive*. This is not a problem that many people can discuss calmly and reasonably.
 - (7) It is *serious*. This is not a trivial matter about which one opinion is as good as another; this subject involves sin and salvation.
- d. All things considered, we are dealing here with a problem that has the makings of a disaster!
3. The problem of married Christians who would not divorce one another but who nevertheless have grown apart emotionally.
- a. There are too many actual divorces, certainly — but for every one of those there are many more situations where couples still living in the same house have been emotionally separated for some time.

- b. EP 6:4.
 - 4. But more than being a place where the factual contents of the Bible are to be learned, the home is the ideal place for the *truth* of these contents to be experienced and learned in real-life situations and relationships.
 - a. Home is where we most often pass beyond “knowing” the truths of the Bible theoretically to *knowing* they are true at the practical level. Cf. 2 TI 1:5.
 - b. Home is where the truths of God’s word are not only taught, but modeled, illustrated, and brought to life. Cf. 2 TI 3:14-15.
 - 5. Bible study must not be superficially tacked on from time to time. When the Bible and its principles are not a real part of the everyday life of the family, we miss many of the valuable teaching and learning opportunities presented by the situations that arise daily. Cf. DT 6:6-9. It is not just coincidence that the various family relationships are used so often in the Scriptures to illustrate spiritual realities.
 - B. Our spirituality as individuals is being damaged in critical ways by our unhealthy family relationships, particularly the deficient husband-wife relationship that exists in so many of our households.
 - 1. There is more to be learned about the Lord and His will in the daily relationship between a husband and a wife than in any other experience in life.
 - a. This is the most intimate relationship possible between human beings. When it is what God intended, there is greater spiritual help here and more to be learned about love, service, etc. than anywhere else in life.
 - b. When this relationship is dysfunctional, however, there is nothing that any more greatly hinders our spiritual health and growth.
 - (1) Our very relationship to the Lord is eroded.
 - (2) PR 28:9.
 - 2. We are only fooling ourselves if we think we can fail to relate properly to one another in the family and still carry on a vibrant, healthy relationship with the Lord in a totally separate compartment of our life. The Lord will not have it.
 - a. MT 5:23-24.
 - b. 1 PE 3:7.

III. HOW WE ARE BEING HINDERED CONGREGATIONALLY

- A. The character traits and personal skills so essential in congregational work are qualities that are primarily learned in the home. When our homes are not the kind that instill these qualities, the result is a serious hindrance in our collective work.
 - 1. Think how vital to our congregational work the kinds of qualities are that Dorothy Rich calls “megaskills” in her book *MegaSkills*: confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, problem solving. See Dorothy Rich, *MegaSkills*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).
 - 2. Just as an example, take the quality of commitment. Are we raising a generation of people incapable of commitment in *any* of their relationships and work because they never experienced what commitment means in the *homes* in which they were raised? In many localities the landscape is strewn with the wreckage of families of people who used to be “members of the church.” The impression left in the minds of the public is not easy to overcome.

- a. What are the implications for the congregation (and for society at large) when, as a people, we have not learned commitment by seeing it modeled in our homes?
- b. In this connection, does not the divorce rate have some alarming implications that reach far beyond the home itself?
3. The home is usually the place where these skills are acquired, if they are acquired at all.
4. What if they are not acquired in our homes? Can we calculate the extent to which that hampers our congregational work?
5. Is it not likely that the devil has said to himself: "I will attack their families so that they do not develop these essential qualities, and then there will be no way their congregational relationship can function effectively."
6. As the family goes, so goes the congregation.
- B. Our evangelistic efforts are being hampered.
 1. In all our various relationships, we are obligated to "adorn the doctrine of God" (TS 2:10) by our conduct.
 2. It needs to be obvious to all who know us that our faith has made a positive difference in the quality of our lives.
 3. Unfortunately, our credibility is being eroded by our failure to make our homes living, working examples of the difference that Christianity makes in human relationships.
 4. If we can do no better than the world in building good homes, can we expect our evangelistic message to be taken seriously?
 5. For this and other reasons, the discipline of unrepentant members guilty of marital unfaithfulness, etc. needs to be swift and decisive. The world is watching to see how seriously we take such sins.

IV. THE SINGLE THING THAT WOULD HELP OUR FAMILIES MOST

- A. If we had husbands and fathers who would *lead* their families, we would be in far less danger than we are. With regard to the family, there is no greater problem among the Lord's people than the widespread failure of men to assume the God-given role as spiritual leaders of their families. 1 CO 11:3; EP 5:23, 25-28; 1 PE 3:7; EP 6:4.
- B. Not all problems can be traced to a failure of leadership, but many can be.
 1. There is little question that many of our family difficulties have resulted from an abdication of their family leadership duties by American men.
 2. The buck ought to stop here!
- C. The husband and father in a home is the "point man" for his family in a hostile jungle. See Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead a Family* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1990).
- D. To focus on one important area as an example, think about the father's role in creating a positive image of God as Father in the minds of his children.
 1. Right thinking and acting come from true concepts of the character of God Himself. Many of our spiritual problems, if not most of them, come from erroneous concepts of God Himself.
 - a. The purpose for which God has revealed truthful information about Himself is that we might know Him: His character, His mind, His person.
 - b. Jesus Christ reveals God to us. JN 1:18; HE 1:1-3.
 - c. Our obedience to God's will is to spring from a genuine love for Him as a personal being. The reason we study about God is to know *Him*. It

would be hard to imagine a greater loss for the Lord's people than the loss of a living example of real fatherhood in our homes.

- d. To have eternal life is to know God. JN 17:3.
2. God reveals Himself to us in the Bible as our Heavenly *Father*.
3. But how much we understand about the fatherhood of God is greatly influenced by our personal concept of what a "father" is and does, a concept that most of us gained in the homes in which we were raised.
4. While possible, it is very difficult to overcome negative fatherhood images that are rooted in childhood experiences with an earthly father.
5. What kind of concept of "father" will prevail in a society like ours where fathers are so rarely what fathers ought to be — and are often absent from the family altogether?
6. What are the consequences for our individual spirituality and our collective work in the Lord when the true concept of fatherhood is lost?
- E. The man "who troubles his own house will inherit the wind" (PR 11:29).
 1. Professional success is not always accompanied by success at home.
 2. Nor can a successful career *compensate* for a man's failure with his family.
- F. A simple, yet powerful, starting point would be for many of us to start spending more *time* with our families.
 1. The "quality time" argument is often nothing more than a copout.
 2. L-O-V-E is spelled T-I-M-E.
- G. Men are instructed to dwell with their wives "with understanding...as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 PE 3:7).
- H. The godly man "walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him" (PR 20:7).
- I. There is simply no command that, when we obey it, gives us and our families any more spiritual help than the command "Husbands, love your wives" (EP 5:25).
- J. There is no worse hindrance to the cause of Christ than when men do not obey this command!

CONCLUSION

- A. As regards the home and family, our society has sown to the wind — and we are now just beginning to reap the whirlwind. Nothing we can do will change the past. What we *can* do is resolve to take positive steps that will make a difference in the future.
- B. What about our own homes?
- C. If we have made serious mistakes — or if other members of our family are not what they ought to be — the last thing the Lord would want us to do is despair.
 1. This study is not meant to make us any more ashamed of the dysfunctional aspects of our families than we already are.
 2. If we simply give up in the face of failure, we will please no one but the devil.
 3. We can learn from our mistakes, and we can use our experience to help others avoid these problems.
- D. The devil's all-out war on the family is one of his main strategies for hindering us spiritually.
- E. We need to rise up in righteous indignation and resolve that we are simply not going to tolerate the devil's attack on our families any longer!
- F. Godly men need to accept the role of leadership, as husbands and fathers, in building healthy families. 1 PE 3:7. In places, a shortage of personal evangelism is so critical that it threatens the very existence of the local church.