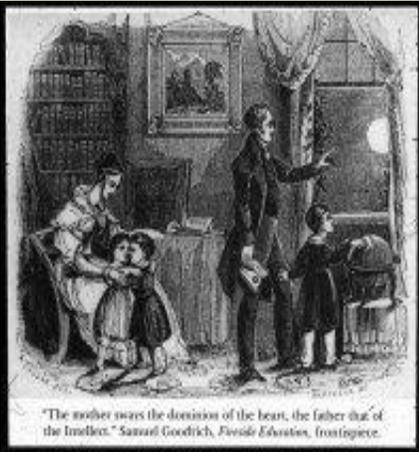


THE IDOLATRY OF FAMILY



In this article, we will be addressing a very controversial topic and slaughter one of the modern church's favorite sacred cows: the worship of 'family' and family relationships. Notice the words of *Jesus*...

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” -Luke 14:26-27

A popular, but unscriptural, dogma of today's church is the “family first” doctrine. Loosely defined and never Biblically supported, this teaching has gained unprecedented sentiment and acceptance in recent years. An amazing feat considering our text and another glaring proof of how unscripturally conditioned the professing church has become. The logic goes something like this: *God ordained the “family,” therefore, anything that disrupts or otherwise pressures the “family” cannot be God.* This false doctrine has become so pervasive and accepted, to challenge its legitimacy is seen as questioning orthodoxy. The end results of this fallacy? Family and marriage relationships often take precedent over God and His will; obedience and service to God are bypassed to appease these relationships.

Now, the essence of idolatry, is to allow anything at all to encroach on our relationship with God. Furthermore, false ideologies generally arise when idolatry takes root in the pursuit of a legitimate end.

“The most dangerous idols are often not the manifestly evil things, but the potentially good things. Things which when offered to God in his service provide rich blessings. But if those same things are used instead to replace God at the center of things – then the abused and misused good becomes a curse not a blessing. And all the more dangerous because it is dressed in such noble clothes.”

Hence, the “family first” doctrine sprang from relationships unsubmitted to God, and men begin to reason along these lines...

“I must be outside of God’s will if my spouse or children are unhappy with me.”

“God's will is for me to make my family happy, fulfilled, and at peace.”

The prophet Isaiah prophesied of such disorder when he declared...

“As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.” -Isaiah 3:12

Again, it seems we’ve forgotten that selfish, sinful nature tends to love its own.

“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.” -Luke 6:32

Who can deny that when a man comes to Christ every relationship must be redefined in Jesus and pass through the cross?

“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake...” -Luke 18:29

Do you suppose God, having freed us from the idolatry of family, would now sanction it and sanctify it? I think not. In this article, we are going to disprove this “family first” doctrine with God’s Word. We will see it is a false doctrine based on three Scriptural points:

1. The clear commandments of God forbid it.
2. Examples of human relationships in Scripture discourage it.
3. The gospel message itself violates its fundamental principle.

IT’S FALSE BECAUSE IT IS FORBIDDEN BY DIRECT COMMAND

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” -Luke 14:26

Besides our text, which most directly addresses our immediate family relationships, there are other commandments. For example...

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”-Exodus 20:3

The first commandment God gave Moses of the Ten Commandments is a reminder that nothing is to rival His person and His will.

“If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers...Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him...” -Deut. 13:6, 8-9

This command clearly indicates that anyone who threatens our obedience and devotion to God is dangerous. Jesus even indicated that obedience to Him could cause great family upheaval.

“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.” -Matthew 10:35-38

Hence, devotion and/or fear of family is clearly revealed in Scripture as a potential stumbling-block to our obedience to God.

IT’S FALSE BECAUSE WE SEE IT DISCOURAGED BY HUMAN EXAMPLE

Both negative and positive examples, and both in the Old Testament and New. For example: Adam violated his walk with God by listening to his wife Eve: he was cursed by God.

“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” -1 Timothy 2:12-14

Among other things, the fallen tendency of men is to want to please their wives. In Numbers

14, the children of Israel refused to obey God and take Canaan land partly because of concern for their families, saying...

“And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?”
-Numbers 14:3

In Judges 6, God commanded Gideon to throw down his father’s altar to Baal and cut down the groves. The Bible says he obeyed but...

“...because he feared his father’s household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.” -Judges 6:27

Eli refused to restrain his wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas: the priesthood was removed from his house. Ahab, often attempting to please his pagan wife Jezebel, compromised the throne of Israel, a God-ordained calling; God said of him...

“...did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.” -1 Kings 16:30

At his calling, Elisha asked Elijah if he could go home and kiss his father and mother before following, he replied...

“...go back again: for what have I done to thee?” -1 Kings 19:20

A potential disciple who Jesus commanded “follow me” begged, “Lord, suffer me first to go bury my father” at which Jesus replied...

“...let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” -Luke 9:60

On the other hand, we have some positive examples. Abraham was willing to offer his son, Issac, as a sacrifice at the command of God: he was called a friend of God.

“...now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” -Genesis 22:12

As Moses is sent back to Egypt as a deliverer, God met him in the way to kill him because he had not practiced circumcision. Moses was willing to obey, even though he obviously disappointed his wife...

Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

Likewise, Elijah, by the Holy Ghost, commanded the widow at Zarephath, to deny herself and her child to feed the prophet.

“..make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.” -1 Kings 17:13

In the N.T., we have examples of Jesus calling men to follow Him resulting, more than likely, in putting great strain upon their families.

*“And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.”
-Matthew 4:21-22*

Jesus, in addressing his own earthly family, displayed his utter devotion to His heavenly Father and His will.

*“There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, **Who is my mother, or my brethren?** And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, **Behold my mother and my brethren!** For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” -Mark 3:31-35*

IT'S FALSE BECAUSE WE SEE IT VIOLATED BY THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” -1 John 4:9-10

Here, in the Gospel message, perhaps the greatest blow to the “Family First” doctrine is dealt. Not only did God the Father send His only Son, He did so knowing that He would be brutally murdered. Furthermore, he did so not for friends, but for His foes.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” -Romans 5:6-8

It should be no surprise, God doesn't follow the idolatrous “family first” doctrine.

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” -Romans 8:32

This is our example: "He spared not" and neither should we in regards to our family. Indeed, we must love our families, but not more than we love God. When following Jesus demands sacrifice of family for the exaltation of Jesus Christ and His Word our choice should always be to deny ourselves and our families...

“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.” -Proverbs 3:27

This disinterested love/divine benevolence is the foundation for all missions work, as Jesus was, in essence, the first N.T. missionary. We will never fulfill our calling apart from disinterested love (uninterested in ourselves).

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” -Matthew 16:24

Denying our wives/families is akin to denying ourselves.

SOME PRACTICAL POINTS TO CONSIDER

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it...” -Psalm 127:1

Indeed, the ‘family’ is important to God, but it must be ordered according to God’s Word. Simply meaning: Obedience to God must be paramount. How is it then that so many teach our family is our first responsibility? Especially in light of Jesus’ words in...

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me...” -John 14:21

The root problem here is when men assume they can separate their relationship with Jesus and their service to him.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” -Matthew 7:21

Our obedience to God’s will reveals the depth and quality of our relationship with God. So, we see that a man’s ministry/service is intrinsically linked to his relationship with God: can I be a good Christian if I am a disobedient husband/father/preacher/pastor/employee? Are we then to neglect our families, let them fall apart, so that we can minister more? Absolutely not, as the Bible teaches...

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” -1 Timothy 5:8

However, if we will foster a willing heart, deny ourselves, and obey God, sufficient time for our families, whatever that may be, will be allotted by God's Spirit. It is true, some have neglected their families in the name of ‘ministry’ and therefore squandered valuable ministry time picking up the pieces. We can, however, go to the opposite extreme, making the family an idol. Men should teach their wives/families to expect to exercise self-denial as they follow Christ. Once again, our text...

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” -Luke 14:26-27

Obviously, Jesus cannot be commanding us to sinfully “hate,” our families, but rather, emphasizing that we have proper spiritual priorities. I recall, as a young Christian meditating on this passage and wondering what Jesus actually meant. I believe Jesus, by the Spirit of God, gently spoke to my heart saying, ‘if you will love Me supremely then your unsaved relatives will sometimes think you have grown to hate them because of your devotion and obedience to Me and My Word’. Oh, how I've found this to be true.

–B.W.