

# **THE PRESENT DAY RELEVANCE OF PAUL'S ADVICE TO THE FAMILY IN EPHESIANS 5:22-25 AND 6:1-9**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Man is a social animal, he needs other human beings in order to survive, develop and achieve anything. The human family is one institution which provides an avenue for man to obtain these benefits from close, relations. It affects every person and influences the society. Many people and organizations have made several efforts to improve and enhance the survival of the family. An example is the advice of Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Christian family in Ephesians 5:22-25 and 6:1-9. This paper examines this advice and its relevance to the society today.

## **WHO WAS ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE?**

He was formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, which was incidentally his birthplace. He became a Roman citizen by inheriting it from his father according to Acts 16:37; 21:39 and 22:25. He was educated in Jewish law at the feet of Gamaliel the Pharisee teacher, and he was given official authority to direct the persecution of Christians (Acts 26:10) (Ellis, 1166). He carried this out zealously until his conversion experience, after which he became a preacher and a victim of persecution.

His background, education, Roman citizenship and interaction with the Jewish religious elite all enhanced his effectiveness as an apostle to the Gentiles. His ministry to the Gentiles involved frequent journeys, periodic stay at some locations for evangelism, and planting of churches, writing of letters or epistles to the churches and some of his notable converts. These letters were aimed at building up their faith or correcting certain errors in their Christian lives.

His advice for the Christian family in Ephesus is situated in his epistle to the Ephesians which is one of his letters. At this juncture it is necessary to examine the meaning and importance of the family as used in the bible.

## **THE MEANING OF THE FAMILY**

The family was seen as a community of persons related by ties of marriage and kinship, and ruled by the authority of the father. The biblical family included the father, mother, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters (until their marriage), grandparents and other kinsmen as well as servants, concubines and sojourners (Barb, 238).

The concept of the family in the Bible differs from the modern institution. The Hebrew family was larger than families today, including the father of the household, his parents, if living, his wife or wives and children, his daughters and sons-in-laws, slaves, guests and foreigners under his protection (Wharton, 154).

This definition of the biblical family covers the scope and relationships of persons to whom Paul directs his advice in the passages. They are: the wife, husband, parents, children, slaves and masters.

The family functioned as a religious community, preserving past traditions and passing them on through instruction and worship; forces that threatened the integrity and security of the family were opposed by biblical writers like Paul.

Barb emphasizes the importance of the family by stating that the origin of the Christian church is associated with worship among families and in the homes of the first Christians (238). He adds that the first churches were communities of Christians who shared the Lord's Supper, sang hymns, read scriptures and prayed in various homes. All believers are members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19), the idea of the family is applied to the nations of Israel and Judah and other foreign

nations, and the language of family relations is transferred to the vocabulary of religion to describe God and man's relationship to him (241).

**PAUL'S ADVICE TO THE FAMILY IN EPHESIANS 5:22-25 AND 6:1-9;  
CHAPTER 5:22-25**

- 22: Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord.
- 23: For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church his body, and is himself its saviour.
- 24: As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.
- 25: Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

**CHAPTER 6:1-9**

- 1. Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right
- 2. Honour your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise).
- 3. That it may be well with you and that you may live long on earth.
- 5. Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Slaves be obedient to those who are your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ!
- 6. Not in the way of eye service, as men pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.
- 7. Rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men.
- 8. Knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

9. Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him (RSV).

### **The Applicability of Paul's Advice to the Family Today**

An analysis and critical look at the advice will enable us to determine its applicability and relevance.

The first advice goes to the wife in chapter 5 verse 22, in which she is advised to submit to her husband as to the Lord. This advice is ideal and seems to be workable in a Christian marriage, in which the partners are obedient to the Bible. It must have been easier for women to submit in Paul's time, because they were regarded as second class citizens and weaker vessels.

This attitude may have arisen from one of the curses placed on Eve in the Genesis account of the fall of man. According to Gen. 3:16, she was placed under the rule and control of her husband, due to her role in the fall of man. This situation had continued until some decades ago when the status of women gradually improved. Women now obtain higher education and achieve other feats like men.

A situation in which the wife is more intelligent, competent and more highly placed than her husband, will make it difficult or impossible for her to submit to her husband. Other hindrances to her submissiveness include a situation in which the wife is right and the husband is wrong. Another is a situation in which the wife is godly, while the husband is ungodly and wicked. Thirdly, is a situation in which the couples are not Christians.

The next advice goes to the husbands in verse 25, where Paul advises them to love their wives as Christ loved and gave himself for the church. This sort of love is sacrificial and unconditional; it does not necessarily depend on the qualities of the wife. It is difficult if not impossible for many husbands to do this, it is not easy to love a woman who is bad or to care for her as Christ cares for the church

and be willing to sacrifice for her. The reality of the present situation is that many husbands do not care for their wives; some soon get fed up with their wives after sometime especially when such wives begin to advance in age. Other causes of this situation include childlessness, stubbornness by the wives and interference of relations and friends. In chapter 6: verse 1 to 3, Paul advises children to obey their parents in the Lord and to honour them, so that they (the children) may live long and it will be well with them, on earth. Such obedience is good and beneficial, but it is not quite practicable today. This is because many children do not obey or honour their parents, due to various negative influences. Moreover, the clause 'obey your parents in the Lord' raises the question of what to do to parents who are not in the Lord, or who are ungodly. Should they be disobeyed or dishonoured?

On their part, fathers (parents) are advised not to provoke their children, but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Unfortunately, some parents maltreat their children, while others pamper, pet and spoil theirs. Due to these, they cannot bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. In chapter 6 verses 5 to 8, Paul advises slaves to obey their earthly masters with respect and fear as they would obey Christ. Paul's advice here creates the impression that he is encouraging them to be contented with their slavery and obey their masters as they would have obeyed Christ. This advice is not quite practicable today because slavery is illegal and out of fashion. Perhaps some benefits could be obtained from it, if it is redirected at servants and stewards, but its success will depend on the degree of godliness and tolerance of the servants in question.

However, the concept and movement of liberation theology which is currently sweeping across the Christian world, poses the greatest threat to this advice. Liberation theologians are involved in a global struggle for social justice and emancipation of the oppressed peoples of the world (Uchegbue 2). Hence it strongly opposes all forms of oppressions, including slavery and servitude. The last

segment of the advice goes to masters in chapter 6 verse 9, They are advised to treat their slaves well and not to threaten them because they also have the same master with their slaves in heaven who treats them all equally and fairly.

This advice is applicable to and directed at those Christians who have servants, slaves or helpers. They are expected to treat their slaves in a way that befits their Christian calling and not to be overbearing towards them (Guthrie, 112). This advice could be applicable among Christian masters, but what about non-Christian masters, especially those in remote and unenlightened areas? There seems to be a problem here.

## **THE PRESENT DAY RELEVANCE OF PAUL'S ADVICE TO THE FAMILY**

The relevance of Paul's advice to the family today is based on the fact that man originates from the family, and needs the help and support of the family in order to develop into a responsible human adult (Rice, 13). The extent, to which the family can achieve this, depends greatly on how the members relate with and treat each other. A family that is characterized by love, tolerance and understanding will succeed in producing and raising up good citizens.

The adoption and application of Paul's advice to the family today could assist and enhance the success of the family in raising up good and responsible citizens. Such people will in turn help to build up healthy societies.

Unfortunately, the present day picture of the family is unpleasant. The family is in crisis, due to teenage rebellion, child abuse, violence against spouses, alcoholism and teenage pregnancy among other factors (Family Happiness 9).

However, there are documented claims of how biblical counsels including Paul's advice have helped some families to overcome some crises. For instance, a

housewife in Indonesia who was a gambler and often quarrelled with her husband was able to resolve her problem through the application of biblical principles for the family (Family Happiness 11). Secondly, a housewife in Spain who was at the point of divorce was able to solve her problem, through the application of biblical principle. Thirdly, the study and application of biblical counsel by a certain Japanese family that was in crisis, enabled them to overcome the crisis and to have peace (11 -12). In our society, the adoption and application of Paul's advice could enhance and improve the wellbeing of the family and society as a whole. This is because even though the advice was initially directed at Christian families, it is equally relevant to other religious adherents like Moslems and traditionalists because their religious ethics includes components that are similar to Paul's advice to the family.

In these religions, wives are equally expected to submit to their husbands, who in turn are expected to love and care for them. Children are expected to respect and submit to their parents, who in turn are expected to bring them up properly with discipline. It is obvious that people who are properly brought up in their families and observe the Pauline counsel in their families, will be useful citizens in the society. For instance a man who loves and cares for his family according to Paul's advice, will be able to do same to other associations of people he belongs to such as the church, office, business or social groups.

This is why many organizations prefer to appoint married people to positions of responsibilities instead of unmarried people. A child, who honours and submits to his parents, will likely do same to other people in the community. Such an attitude will enhance a peaceful, progressive and successful society.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

An overview of this paper shows that as a social animal, man needs other human beings in order to survive and become useful in the society. The human family is one of the most important avenues of socializing man and enabling him to fulfill his role in the society.

However in modern times, the family has failed to perform its proper upbringing of individuals due to various factors. These include teenage rebellion, child abuse, violence against spouses, alcoholism and teenage pregnancy among others. In the light of the above situation, this paper has attempted to examine the possibility of applying Paul's advice to help the family to overcome these problems. It has also examined the relevance of this advice to the present day society. In the process, it notes that an observation and application of this advice to the family in our society, could improve and strengthen it, and subsequently improve the society, irrespective of the religion involved. In view of the foregoing, this writer advocates that Paul's advice to the family, should be widely taught, applied and instilled into the public through various ways, including schools, churches, social groups, mass media and other possible means. Hopefully, this will help to improve the family, church and society as a whole.



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