

Bay Roberts Seventh-day Adventist Church

Website: <http://www.bayrobortssda.org> | **E-mail:** bibleanswers@bayrobortssda.org

Post: P.O. Box 930 Bay Roberts NL A0A 1G0 | Tel: (709) 786-7516

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.

The home is a primary setting for the restoration of the image of God in men and women. Within the family, father, mother, and children can express themselves fully, meeting each other's needs for belonging, love, and intimacy. Here identity is established and feelings of personal worth are developed. The home is also the place where, by God's grace, the principles of real Christianity are put into practice, and its values transmitted from one generation to the next.

The family can be a place of great happiness. It can also be the scene of terrible hurt. Harmonious family life demonstrates the principles of Christianity truly lived out, revealing the character of God. Unfortunately, the manifestation of these characteristics is altogether too rare in modern homes. Instead, many families demonstrate the thoughts and intents of the selfish human heart—quarreling, rebelliousness, rivalry, anger, impropriety, and even cruelty. Yet these characteristics were not part of God's original plan. Jesus said, "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

From the Beginning

The Sabbath and marriage are two of God's original gifts to the human family. They were intended to provide the joys of rest and belonging regardless of time, place, and culture. The establishment of these two institutions culminated God's creation of this earth. They were His finale, the best of the exceedingly good gifts He gave humanity at Creation. In establishing the Sabbath, God gave human beings a time of rest and renewal, a time for fellowship with Him. In forming the first family, He established the basic social unity for humanity, giving them a sense of belonging and providing them with an opportunity to develop as well-rounded persons in service to God and others.

Male and Female in the Image of God

Genesis 1:26,27 describes God's creation of the human beings who were to inhabit this earth: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'...So God created man in His own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." The term man is used here (in both the Hebrew and the English) in the generic sense, as it is more than 500 times elsewhere in the Old Testament. This term includes both male and female. The text makes clear that it was not a case of the male being created in the image of God and the female in the image of the man. On the contrary, both were made in the image of God.

Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God, male and female together are to make up "man." And like the Godhead, though they are to be one, they are not the same in function. They are equal in being, in worth, but not identical in person (cf. John 10:30; 1 Cor. 11:3). Their physiques are complementary, their functions cooperative.

Both genders are good (Gen. 1:31), and so are their different roles. The family and the home are built upon the fact of sexual differentiation. God could have propagated life on earth without creating male and female, as is demonstrated in the asexual reproduction of some forms of animal life. But God made "two individuals, identical in general form and characteristics, but each containing within itself something lacking in the other and complementary to the other." A world made up exclusively of members of either sex would not be complete. True fulfillment can come only in a society that involves both male and female. Equality is no question here, for both are essential.

During his first day, Adam, the firstborn and so the head of the human race, sensed his uniqueness—there was no other like him. "But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:20). God was sensitive to this lack, for He said, "'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen. 2:18).

The Hebrew word *neged*, translated "comparable" here, is a noun related to the preposition that means to stand "before, in front of, opposite, corresponding to" someone or something. In this case the person who was to stand in front of Adam was to complement him, corresponding to him as his counterpart. So God "caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam," and taking "one of his ribs" (Gen. 2:21), shaped his companion>(*4) Upon awakening, Adam instantly recognized the close and intimate relationship that this specific act of creation made possible. He exclaimed, "'At last, here is one of my own kind—bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh. "Woman" is her name because she was taken out of man'" (Gen. 2:23, TEV; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8).

Marriage

From the diversity of male and female God brought order, oneness. That first Friday He performed the first marriage, joining these two, the epitome of His image, to make them one. And marriage has been the foundation of the family, the foundation of society itself, ever since.

Scripture describes marriage as a decisive act of both detachment and attachment: One shall "leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, KJV).

1. Leaving.

Vital to the marriage relationship is a leaving behind of the former primary relationships. The marriage relationship is to supersede that of the parent and child. In this sense, "leaving" one's relationship with one's parents allows one to "cleave" to another. Without this process, there is no firm foundation for marriage.

2. Cleaving.

The Hebrew term translated "cleave" comes from a word that means "to stick to, to fasten, to join, to hold onto." As a noun it can even be used for brazing and soldering (Isa. 41:7). The closeness and strength of this bond illustrates the nature of the bond of marriage. Any attempt to break up this union would injure individuals bound this closely together. That this human bond is a close one is also emphasized by the fact that the same verb is used to convey the bond between God and His people: "Him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name" (Deut. 10:20, KJV).

3. Covenanting.

In Scripture this pledge, this promise by which married couples are bound together, is spoken of as a "covenant," the term used for the most solemn and binding agreement known in God's Word (Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:16,17). The relationship between husband and wife is to be patterned after God's everlasting covenant with His people, the church (Eph. 5:21-33). Their commitment to each other is to take on the faithfulness and endurance that characterize God's covenant (Ps. 89:34; Lam. 3:23).

God and the couple's family, friends, and community witness the covenant that they make with each other. That covenant is ratified in heaven. "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6). The Christian couple understand that in marrying, they have covenanted to be faithful to each other for as long as they both live.

4. Becoming one flesh.

The leaving and covenanting to cleave results in a union that is a mystery. Here is a oneness in the full sense—the married couple walk together, stand together, and share a deep intimacy. At the outset this oneness refers to the physical union of marriage. But beyond that, it also refers to the intimate bond of mind and emotions that undergirds this physical side of the relationship.

a. Walking together.

Of His relationship with His people, God asks, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3, KJV). That query is appropriate also of those who would become one flesh. God instructed the Israelites not to intermarry with the neighboring nations, "for they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods" (Deut. 7:4; cf. Joshua 23:11-13). When the Israelites ignored these instructions, they met with disastrous consequences (Judges 14-16; 1 Kings 11:1-10; Ezra 9:10).

Paul reiterated this principle in broad terms: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:14-16; cf. vs. 17,18).

Clearly, Scripture intends that believers should marry only other believers. But the principle extends even beyond this. True oneness demands an agreement as to beliefs

and practices. Differences in religious experience lead to differences in lifestyle that can create deep tensions and rifts in the marriage. To achieve the oneness Scripture speaks of, then, people should marry others within their own communion.

b. Standing together.

To become one flesh, two people must become completely loyal to each other. When one marries, one risks everything and accepts everything that comes with one's mate. Those who marry proclaim their willingness to share their mates' accountability, to stand with their mates against anything. Marriage requires an active, pursuing love that will not give up.

"Two persons share everything they have, not only their bodies, not only their material possessions, but also their thinking and their feeling, their joy and their suffering, their hopes and their fears, their successes and their failures. 'To become one flesh' means that two persons become completely one with body, soul, and spirit, and yet there remain two different persons."

c. Intimacy.

Becoming one flesh involves sexual union: "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived" (Gen. 4:1). In their drive to be joined together, a drive that men and women have felt since the days of Adam and Eve, each couple reenacts the first love story. The act of sexual intimacy is the nearest thing to a physical union possible for them; it represents the closeness the couple can know emotionally and spiritually as well. Christian married love should be characterized by warmth, joy, and delight (Prov. 5:18,19).

"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). "The Scriptures tell us clearly that the joyous sexual expression of love between husband and wife is God's plan. It is, as the writer of Hebrews emphasizes, undefiled, not sinful, not soiled. It is a place of great honor in marriage—the holy of holies where husband and wife meet privately to celebrate their love for each other. It is a time meant to be both holy and intensely enjoyable."

5. Biblical love.

Marital love is an unconditional, affectionate, and intimate devotion to each other that encourages mutual growth in the image of God in all aspects of the person: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Different types of love operate in marriage; it has its romantic, passionate times; its highly sentimental times; its comfortable times; its companionable and sense-of-belonging times. But it is the agape love described in the New Testament—the selfless, all-for-other love—that comprises the foundation of true, lasting marital love.

Jesus manifested the highest form of this kind of love when, accepting both the guilt and the consequences for our sins, He went to the cross. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1, NASB). He loved us in spite of the end to which our sins brought Him. This was and is the unconditional agape love of Jesus Christ.

Describing this love, Paul said: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own,

is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Commenting on this passage, Ed Wheat wrote: "Agape love is plugged into an eternal power source and it can go on operating when every other kind of love fails....It loves, no matter what. No matter how unlovable the other person is, agape can keep on flowing. Agape is as unconditional as God's love for us. It is a mental attitude based on a deliberate choice of the will."

6. Individual spiritual responsibility.

Though marriage partners have made a covenant commitment to each other, they must each individually bear the responsibility for the choices that they make (2 Cor. 5:10). Taking such responsibility means that they will never blame the other person for what they themselves have done. They must also accept the responsibility for their own spiritual growth; no one can rely upon another's spiritual strength. Yet, on the other hand, each one's relationship with God can serve as a source of strength and encouragement to the other.

The Effects of the Fall Upon Marriage

The distortion of humanity's reflection of God's image that sin brought had its effect upon marriage as certainly as it did on any other area of human experience. Self-interest intruded where perfect love and unity once reigned. Selfishness is the primary motivator of all those not compelled by the love of Christ. Running counter to all of the principles of surrender, servanthood, and giving that the gospel represents, it is the common denominator of all Christian failure.

By their disobedience Adam and Eve contravened the purpose of their creation. Before they sinned, they had lived in full openness before God. After, instead of joyfully coming to Him, they fearfully hid from Him, attempting to conceal the truth about themselves and denying their responsibility for their actions. Pervaded with a deep sense of guilt that their rationalizations could not erase, they could not meet the eye of God and the holy angels. Since then this evasion and self-justifying denial has been the common pattern of human relationships with God.

The fear that drove them to concealment distorted not only Adam's and Eve's relation to God, but also to each other. When God questioned them, they both sought to protect themselves at the expense of another. Their accusations give evidence of the serious breakdown that had occurred in the loving relationship God had established at Creation.

After sin God told the woman, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). He intended this principle, which did not change the basic equality of the man and woman, to benefit both that first couple and married couples thereafter. Unfortunately this principle became distorted. Since that time dominance through power, manipulation, and destruction of individuality has characterized marriage through the ages. Self-centeredness has left acceptance and appreciation of one another in short supply.

The essence of Christianity is living in the self-denying harmony that characterized marriage before the Fall, which destroyed this harmony. The affections of husband and

wife are to contribute to each other's happiness. Each is to cultivate the happiness of the other. They are to blend as one, yet neither of them is to lose his or her individuality, which belongs to God.

Deviations From God's Ideal

Polygamy.

The practice of one mate's maintaining several spouses runs contrary to the oneness and union that God established with the first marriage in Eden. In polygamy there is no forsaking of all others. Although Scripture describes plural marriages as a cultural reality in the time of the patriarchs, its description clearly shows that those marriages did not attain the divine ideal. The various sub-units within those marriages became involved in power struggles, bitter resentments, and alienation (see Gen. 16; cf. 29:16-30:24, et al.), using the children as emotional weapons to injure other members of the family.

Monogamous marriage provides couples with a sense of belonging that strengthens their intimacy and bonding. They realize that their relationship is unique and that no one else can share what they do. The monogamous relationship reflects most clearly the relationship between Christ and His church and between the individual and God.

Fornication and Adultery

Current thinking and practice make light of lasting commitments in which both spouses are sexually faithful to each other until death. But Scripture regards any sexual relations outside of marriage as sin. The seventh commandment remains in effect and unchanged: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14, KJV). No qualifiers or disqualifiers are mentioned here. This commandment is a principle that jealously guards the marriage relationship.

The full import of the Biblical view of fornication and adultery stands in direct contrast to today's tolerance of such activities by "consenting adults." Many passages in both the Old and the New Testament condemn such practices (Lev. 20:10-12; Prov. 6:24-32; 7:6-27; 1 Cor. 6:9,13,18; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3; etc.).

Such liaisons can have far-reaching and long-lasting effects. They defraud the legitimate sexual partner, and may harm him or her physically, emotionally, financially, legally, and socially. They hurt the extended family, and if children are involved, they particularly injure them. These liaisons may result in the transmission of venereal diseases and the birth of illegitimate babies. Then, too, the cloud of lies and dishonesty that hovers over such affairs so destroys trust that it may never be restored. Even aside from the Biblical injunctions against these forms of immorality, the train of unfortunate consequences that result should provide ample warning against engaging in them.

Impurity of Thought

Sin is not merely the outward act; rather, it is also a matter of the heart that reaches deeply into the thought patterns. If the springs are polluted, the rivers are not likely to be clean. Jesus saw that the inner reservoir of the mind motivated human behavior, "for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt. 15:19, RSV). In this vein He traced the act of unfaithfulness to the

thoughts and emotions: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery," But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27,28).

An entire industry has developed to capitalize upon the perversion of the imagination. The sensual films and books it produces have no place in the Christian life. They not only encourage illicit relationships, they also reduce men and women to mere sexual objects, thus distorting the true meaning of sexuality and obscuring the image of God. Christians are called upon to think pure thoughts and live pure lives because they are preparing to live in a pure society throughout all eternity.

Incest

Some parents cross the boundary that demarcates the healthy expression of affection to their children, becoming physically and emotionally intimate with them. Often this results when the normal husband-wife relationship has been neglected and one of the children has been chosen to play the role of the spouse. This blurring of boundaries may also occur between siblings and extended family members.

Incest was forbidden in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:6-29; Deut. 27:20-23) and condemned in the New (1 Cor. 5:1-5). This kind of abuse damages the child's developing sexuality and creates in him or her an unwarranted burden of shame and guilt that he or she may bring into marriage later in life. When parents transgress those boundaries, they damage the child's developing sense of trust—so vital to faith in God.

Divorce

A statement Jesus made sums up the Biblical teaching on divorce: "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:7-9). Marriage is sacred because God has consecrated it. Ultimately it is God who joins the husband and wife, not mere human words or the sexual act. So it is He who has sealed their union. The Christian understanding of divorce and remarriage, then, must be based on scriptural grounds.

Jesus' statement makes clear the basic scriptural principle that undergirds a Christian understanding of divorce: God intended marriage to be indissoluble. When the Pharisees asked Him whether marital incompatibility was reason enough for divorce, He affirmed the Eden model of marriage as a permanent union. When they pressed Him further about Moses' laws of divorce, He answered, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). He went on to stipulate that the only legitimate reason for divorce was sexual infidelity (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

His response to the Pharisees makes it clear that Jesus had a far deeper understanding of fidelity than they did. From what He said, and from the principles regarding marriage in both the Old and New Testaments, it can be affirmed that God intends those who marry to reflect the image of God in a permanent union.

Even the unfaithfulness of one's spouse does not necessarily mean that the marriage must end in divorce. The way of the cross encourages deep repentance and forgiveness, the putting away of the roots of bitterness. Even in the case of adultery,

through forgiveness and the reconciling power of God, the injured spouse should seek to maintain God's original purpose in Creation. "Biblically speaking, adultery need be no more destructive to your marriage than any other sin....When you are ready to forgive and let go of your negative attitudes, God will be more than ready to heal you and renew your love for each other."

While the divine ideal for marriage is that of a loving and permanent union that continues until the death of one partner, at times a legal separation becomes necessary because of offenses such as physical abuse to spouse or child. "In some civil jurisdictions such a separation can be secured only by divorce, which under these circumstances would not be condemned. But such a separation or divorce, in which 'unfaithfulness to the marriage vow' is not involved, does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried, committed adultery or fornication, or been removed by death."

Because marriage is a divine institution, the church has a unique and solemn responsibility both to prevent divorce and, should divorce occur, to heal as far as possible the wounds it causes.

Homosexuality

God created male and female to differ from and yet to complement each other. And when He did so, He oriented their sexual feelings toward those of the opposite sex. The differentiation and connectedness that characterize people are manifested in the attraction that draws the two sexes to each other in order to form a whole relationship.

In some cases, sin has affected even this basic orientation, bringing about a phenomenon that has been termed inversion. In such cases, the natural orientation toward the opposite sex appears inverted, producing a basic sexual orientation toward people of the same gender.

Scripture condemns homosexual practices in strongly negative terms (Gen. 19:4-10; cf. Jude 7,8; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-28; 1 Tim. 1:8-10). Practices of this type produce a serious distortion of the image of God in men and women.

Because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, KJV), Christians will deal redemptively with those who are afflicted by this disorder. They will reflect the attitude Christ took toward the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11, KJV). Not only those with homosexual tendencies, but all persons who are trapped in behaviors or relationships that cause anxiety, shame, and guilt need the sympathetic ear of a trained and experienced Christian counselor. No behavior is beyond the reach of God's healing grace.

The Family

After God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion over the world (Gen. 1:26; 2:15). They made up the first family, the first church, and marked the beginning of society. Thus society was built upon marriage and the family. Because they were the only human inhabitants of the earth, God commanded them "'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:28).

As world population statistics indicate, an unpopulated earth no longer cries out to be filled and subdued. But those married Christian couples who decide to bring children into the world still have the obligation of rearing their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Before a married couple sets out upon that course, they should consider God's ideal for the family.

Parents

1. The father.

Scripture has given the husband and father the responsibility of being head and priest of the household (Col. 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-8). He becomes a type of Christ, the head of the church. "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Eph. 5:23-28).

As Christ leads the church, husband and wife "both should be yielding, but the Word of God gives preference to the judgment of the husband" where it is not a matter of conscience. At the same time he has the responsibility to treat her individuality with utmost respect.

As Christ demonstrated a gentle rulership that went to the cross in servanthood, so the husband is to lead sacrificially. "Christ's rule is one of wisdom and love, and when husbands fulfill their obligations to their wives, they will use their authority with the same tenderness as Christ uses toward the church. When the Spirit of Christ controls the husband, the wife's subjection will only result in rest and benefit, for he will require from her only that which will result in good, and in the same way that Christ requires submission from the church....Let those who stand as husbands study the words of Christ, not to find out how complete must be the subjection of the wife, but how he may have the mind of Christ, and become purified, refined, and fit to be the lord of his household."

As priest of the family, like Abraham, the father will gather his family about at the beginning of the day and commit them to the Lord's care. In the evening he will lead them into praising Him and thanking Him for the blessings bestowed. This family worship will be the tie that binds—the time that gives God priority in the family.

The wise father spends time with his children. A child may learn many lessons from the father, such as respect and love for their mother, love for God, the importance of prayer, love for other people, the way to work, modesty, love for nature and the things God has made. But if the father is never home, the child is deprived of this privilege and joy.

2. The mother.

Motherhood is the closest thing on earth to being in partnership with God. "The king upon this throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. She has in her power the molding of her children's characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission; for in

doing this work she is doing service for God....Let her realize the worth of her work and put on the whole armor of God, that she may resist the temptation to conform to the world's standard. Her work is for time and for eternity."

Somebody in the family must bear the ultimate responsibility for the character of the children. Child training cannot be haphazard or delegated to others, for no one feels quite the same about a child as do its parents. God created the mother with the ability to carry the child within her own body, to suckle the child, and to nurture and love it. Except for the extenuating circumstances of severe financial burdens or of being a single parent, if she will accept it, a mother has the unique privilege of remaining with her children all day; she can enjoy working with the Creator in shaping their characters for eternity.

"Someone in a relationship needs to consider the family as a career....Taking on the career of being a mother and wife is a fabulously rare lifework in the twentieth century, and a very challenging job. A wasted effort? A thankless job? An undignified slave? No, a most exciting possibility of turning the tide, of saving the species, of affecting history, of doing something that will be felt and heard in ever-widening circles."

In Old Testament times a person's name conveyed a short statement about the person who bore it. Eve received her name after the Fall (Gen. 3:20). Because she was to become the mother of all human beings, her name (Hebrew chawwah) was derived from the word for "living" (Hebrew chay). It reflects the extraordinary position of honor that she occupies in the history of the human race.

Just as procreation was not the sole and exclusive right of either Adam or Eve, so neither was parenthood. The latter was also to be a shared responsibility. And so it should be now, not only in the bearing of children but also in the rearing of them. Each parent has certain responsibilities, and they are to be carried out as to the Lord. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Ps. 127:3, KJV).

Children

1. A priority.

Other than their commitments to the Lord and their spouses, parents have no higher responsibility than to the children that they have brought into the world. They must put their children's interests before their own advancement and comfort; the children did not choose to come into the world, and they must be given the best possible start in life. Since prenatal influences vitally affect one's spiritual, mental, and physical health, making the child's welfare a priority should begin even before birth.

2. Love.

A parent's love should be unconditional and sacrificial. Even though it may never be completely reciprocated, children must have it to have a good self-image and emotional health throughout life. Children who have to win love or who feel rejected and unimportant will try to obtain their parents' love through undesirable behaviors that become ingrained and habitual.

Children who are secure in their parents' love will reach out to others. They can be taught to give as well as to receive and that there is a reason for existence beyond self. As children develop, they can learn to glorify God.

3. Commitment.

Christian parents are to dedicate their children to God's service at the earliest possible moment of life. Seventh-day Adventist congregations provide for such a dedication with a simple ceremony in which, before the congregation, parents present their children to God in prayer, much as Joseph and Mary presented the infant Jesus to the Lord in the Temple (Luke 2:22-39). In this manner the child begins life as a part of an extended spiritual family. Members of the congregation participate in the social and spiritual development of the young one as a child of God and a member of the body of Christ.

In this service the parents also dedicate themselves to educate the child in the way of the Lord so that the image of God will be formed in the child. To reach this goal, parents will bring their children to Sabbath school and church regularly so that the little ones become a part of the body of Christ early in life. Then, as the child reaches school age, the parents and church will make every effort to enable him or her to have the Christian education that will nurture that child's love for the Lord even further.

4. Constancy.

The spiritual teaching the parents do is an ongoing process that enters into every phase of the child's life. "You shall teach them [the Lord's commands] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:7-9; 11:18 ff).

The child is influenced by the whole atmosphere of the home. The parents cannot convey spirituality through family worship alone. It must come through their continual trusting in Jesus; it must be manifested in their lifestyles, clothing, and even home decorations. Knowing God as a loving parent is vital to the child's Christian growth.

5. Learning obedience.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). What does this training entail? Discipline implies far more than punishment. Punishment usually deals with the past, whereas discipline looks to the future. Discipline is a discipling process in which a young one is apprenticed to the parent for training, guidance, and example. It means teaching important principles such as loyalty, truth, equity, consistency, patience, order, mercy, generosity, and work.

When children learn early to obey their parents implicitly, authority poses no problem to them in life. But the type of obedience learned is important also. True obedience comes not simply because it is required, but because it springs from within. The secret of this kind of obedience lies in the new birth.

"The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey.... True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is

loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because rightdoing is pleasing to God."

6. Socialization and language development.

It is within the family that children are socialized as members of the human race, with all the responsibilities and privileges that entails. Socialization is the process by which children learn the basic skills with which to function in society. Language with all its nuances of communication is one of the first skills the child learns. The language used in the home needs careful monitoring, then, so that it reveals God's character. The child should hear frequent joyous and spontaneous expressions of affection among family members, and praise to God.

7. Gender identity.

It is in the home, through wholesome interaction with the males and females that make up the entire family system, that children learn to function as male or female within society. Adults need to teach them the beauty of their developing sexuality through correct and appropriate information. It is also their responsibility to safeguard the children from sexual abuse.

8. Learning values.

A basic socializing function of the home is to provide for the assimilation of the values espoused by the family. The family's values and religious concepts do not always coincide. Parents may claim to adhere to certain religious principles, but the values that they model before the child may not be in accordance with those principles. It is important that parents be consistent.

The Extended Family

Marriage, as God designed it, is exclusive; family is not. In a highly mobile society one rarely finds extended families—grandparents, siblings, and cousins—all living in close proximity. The church family can help those far from or without kin find a true sense of worth and belonging. Here, too, single parents can find a comfortable place in which to rear their children with love and tender cherishing. And the church may supply appropriate role models that may be lacking in the home.

Through learning to love the old people in the congregation, children can learn respect. And those who are old can experience the satisfaction of having a little one to love and enjoy. "Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (Ps. 71:18).

God gives special consideration to the elderly, saying, "The silverhaired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. 16:31), and "Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa. 46:4).

In the church, singles may find a special place to be loved and cherished and to share their love and energies as well. Through its ministry they can come to sense God's care for them: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (Jer. 31:3).

It is part of "pure religion" to give special care to those in need (James 1:27; Ex. 22:22; Deut. 24:17; 26:12; Prov. 23:10; Isa. 1:17). The church family has a special opportunity to provide a haven, a shelter, a place of belonging to those who do not have a family; it may surround and include each member in the special unity that Christ said would be the mark of Christianity itself (John 17:20-23).

The Turning

Since the family is the very soul of the church and society, the Christian family itself will be the instrument of winning and holding its members for the Lord. The very last verses of the Old Testament are a prophecy of what will take place before the Lord returns: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:5, 6). While many forces today attempt to pull the members from the family, God's call is to a reuniting, a resolidifying, a turning and restoration. And those families that respond to His call will have a strength that will reveal real Christianity. The churches made up of those families will grow; their young people will not leave; they will portray to the world a clear picture of God.