

But . . . How Does It Really Work?

“Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people”

Jeremiah 7:23 NAS

We, as a nation and as a church, are a long ways away from having God-ordained families as our norm. In fact, our ways are so far from His ways that it appears we could never re-establish families the way God has ordained them again. This appearance is false. The truth is that re-establishing families the way God has ordained will be difficult, it will take concerted effort, it will take great focus on the direction of the Holy Spirit and The Church must take the lead in this transformation. But it is not impossible because God is at it's root (Luke 18:27).

History

Believe it or not, ours is not a unique situation. In the book of Ezra we read of a group of Jews who, like us, ignored God's commands regarding marriage. God had told the Jews not to intermarry with the heathens of the land (Ezra 9:1). In fact, the leaders of the people were the worst offenders. What was Ezra's response? We are told in Ezra 9:3-4 “And when I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.” This was nothing to sluff off! The unfaithfulness to God was clear. The offense to God could not be missed. And unlike those who were content to be dictated to by the culture, Ezra honored God and his example led everyone to tremble before God at the sin in their midst. His petition before God was a heart-wrenching confession of God's grace and their guilt on behalf of his people. Note that this assembly included men, women and children who were weeping before God for their abominable sin!

Hard Solutions

How did God lead them to address this sinful situation? The decision made was extreme: Each man was called on to put away his wife and his children who were heathens. The consequence for not putting away wife and children was also extreme: He gave up his possessions and his inheritance as an Israelite (Ezra 10). Obviously, they did not take God or His commands lightly! Were they in sin? Yes! Was the situation irreversible? No! Did it require extreme measures for their repentance? Yes! The bottom line was: They understood they could not serve God and man and doing things their way was detrimental to their well-being.

Reality

We face much the same situation today. A cursory look at marriages and families, even in the church, as compared to God-ordained relationships will quickly reveal we are sinning against God. Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, we have taken on the values of our culture, perverting the institutions of marriage and family.

There may be some who would look at the solution arrived at in Ezra and say, “Wow! Wouldn't it be great to have the ecclesiastical equivalent of a “do over?” Wouldn't it be great to say, “I made a mistake, my marriage is not right with God, I'm going to walk away and start again.”? But wait! Isn't that what we have done in our own strength and wisdom? It is called divorce. There is actually only one problem with that:

“For I hate divorce, says Yaweh, the God of Israel.” Malachi 2:16 NAS

A “do over” attitude is self-centered. A “do over” attitude forgets that what we are talking about here are people's lives. We are talking about relationships which have not only physical but emotional and spiritual components to them as well. There are no “do overs” without consequences.

Modern Equivalent

If you are to hope to regain God-ordained relationships you must begin where Ezra began. You must personally look at God's standards. You must compare every relationship you have to His holy standards and ask, “How do my relationships compare to God's description of His purpose for them?” Are your relationships, all of them, holy and righteous before Almighty God?

Because we are a fallen people in a fallen world I believe none of us can say before God, “My relationships are untainted by the unrighteousness of the world.” What, then, is your response? What is the modern equivalent of tearing your garment, pulling hair from your head and beard and sitting down before your Holy God, appalled? Do you even know what the equivalent is?

Are relationships, as God has ordained them, of *ultimate* value to you? Is your violation of His ordained relationships appalling to you? Are the acceptable standards of the culture around you no longer acceptable to you? Are they indeed a putrefied stench in your nostrils? Are your current relationships, where they conflict with God’s design, grievous to you? Would you sit in the assembly of your congregation with your wife and your children, in the rain, trembling before God not because you were cold but because you knew you have grieved Him deeply? Or are you satisfied with your relationships as they are?

Choose You This Day

We have moved so far away from God’s design for relationships that the cost to return them to Him will be great. Maybe, you aren’t even that concerned. I mean, things seem to be going well for you and your family. Okay, a little rocky, but okay for the most part. Why upset the apple cart?

Let me refer you back to the book of Ezra. Here is a people who understood clearly the trouble they were in for ignoring God’s commands. You should have the same respect and show God no less honor. His way **MUST** be your desire.

If grieving God does not shake you to your very foundation then you probably will not be willing to pay the price required to change your relationships into being God-honoring. If that is where you are today I want to lay before you two challenges.

First, be honest with yourself and with those around you. State, for the record, that you are rejecting God’s design for relationships and that you are choosing, instead, some formula, other than His, which includes in it the cultural value of self-centered living. This clarification is important for you and those with whom you have relationships, especially in the Christian community.

Second, accept the fact that there are consequences to your intentional rebellion and prepare yourself for God’s response ([Romans 2:5-8](#)). He may give you up to your own lusts ([Romans 1:21-25](#)). You may not know His judgement until the final Judgement Day. Or, on the other extreme, He may chose to make an example of you as He did with Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)).

The bottom line is, you need to stop pretending that God doesn’t care about your blatant rebellion. You need to stop playing games and either allow Him to realign who you are or go your own way accepting the consequences for doing so. “Choose you this day whom you will serve ([Joshua 24:15](#)).”

Help Thou My Unbelief

Maybe there is a middle ground here. Perhaps the desire of your heart is to be holy and righteous before God in every aspect of your life. BUT (that great separator between desire and obedience) you don’t have the faith that God can transform you into a person of God-honoring relationships. Take cheer! God is in the life changing business!!!

God says it so clearly in [Romans 12:2](#) “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” NAS Take heart in God’s process. The transformation in your life is done by God through His Holy Spirit ([John 14:26, 16:13](#)), His Holy Word ([Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)) and your obedience ([Romans 6:16](#)). It is through His power you are transformed. Are you weak? Never fear, God is at work in you ([Philippians 2:12-13](#))!

What Difference Will It Make?

“I am only one person,” I hear you say, “how can I make a difference in our culture?” Let me share a little secret with you: The world is changed one heart at a time. This is God’s plan. Who you are impacts people: spouse, children, parents, co-workers, relatives, neighbors, strangers. When you stop living for yourself and start allowing God to define your relationship with other people they too will be changed. They won’t be changed by you, they will be changed because the light of Christ is flowing through you into them.

Your obedience to God is a witness to other believers and non-believers alike. Whether they want to or not, they will see the difference between a self-centered life and a God-centered life. And God, as only He can, changes the lives of others.

Now, you may not see the changes taking place in the lives around you, that is not material. What is

material for each individual (that means you) is obedience to the Father. When each individual is personally obedient to the Father, His Church will be who she needs to be, impacting our culture.

God-ordained relationships – formed by God Himself through one humble servant at a time.

Next Issue: **God-Ordained Congregations**
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