

Stumbling Blocks in the Family

1- Objectives

- ❖ Healthy relationship between parents and children.
- ❖ How to deal with stumbling blocks in the family.

2- Reference

- ❖ “The Ten Commandments” by HH Pope Shenouda III (Volume II)
- ❖ <http://www.drnabilbaky.com/>

3- Scriptural Verse

- ❖ “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:22-25)
- ❖ “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.... And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1-4)

4- Lesson Guidelines

- ❖ When we begin to formulate ideas of who we are as individuals, who are our parents and our families, we also begin to formulate an idea about who God is and who is He for our families.
- ❖ Each one's role in the family has a great impact on our life in general and in our spiritual life specifically.
- ❖ Many times when roles are not carried out properly by members of our family, we feel a kind of instability in our life and also our view of God is significantly affected.
- ❖ Sometimes, because of any negligence or wrong behavior of parents or older siblings, wounds are created that we have to live and deal with for the rest of our lives.

Dysfunctional family situations

- ❖ **Poor Communication:** the art of communication is a must to be learned in the family, especially between couples then with their children. Sharing ideas and decisions is not optional; sometimes the lack of sharing one's decisions can be a source of contentions in a family.
- ❖ Eve saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise (Genesis 3:6), so she decided alone to eat from it and did not communicate with Adam; the result was a disaster.
- ❖ **Role Reversal:** Keeping everyone his role with love and respect is the security valve for any problem or discussion that can arise in the family. Declining from your role even to be courteous is not a healthy way of action.

- ❖ Adam declined of his role as the priest of the family who speaks with God and takes care of his wife; he did not rebuke Eve for her disobedience but in the contrary, he took from her hand and ate (Genesis 3: 7).
- ❖ Eli the priest declined to discipline his children according to God's commandments so they perished "Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:17).
- ❖ **Favoritism:** There should not be any favoritism in the family among children, as this can be a real stumbling block in front of them and they may commit the worst crime just to revenge or to get attention.
- ❖ This favoritism played a huge role and arose problems in the life of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25 and 27) and it ruined even the life of their parents (Rebecca never saw Jacob again).
- ❖ It was even worse in the life of the sons of Jacob who plotted to kill their brother and finally sold him as a slave; while Jacob suffered the loss of his son for a long time and said about his days "few and evil have been the days of the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9).
- ❖ Note that Cain killed Abel because he thought that there were a favoritism that came from God. So, we should be very careful with our relationship with God to understand His will and to accept it with humbleness. Note that God refused Cain's sacrifice, as it was not a bloody sacrifice according to His plan for salvation.
- ❖ **Poor Role Model:** children always look to their parents as a role model; when they are young, they think that their parents cannot err and the parents' behavior engraves itself in the mind of the child.
- ❖ When getting older they have to respect their parents even if they realized that they are mistaken in many things. They should only obey what is according to God's "Obey your parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1).
- ❖ At a point of his life, Noah acted wrongly by getting drunk in front of his sons. But how did they react? Ham did wrong to mock his father and was punished for that while Sam and Japheth respectfully covered him and they were blessed (Genesis 9:20-27).
- ❖ **Discouragement:** Encouragement is a very healthy and much needed attitude between all family members, while discouragement can lead to severe problems. A stressed person because of discouragement, especially a child, can harm himself and those around him.
- ❖ The Bible teaches us to strengthen the weak "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees" (Hebrews 12:12). And our Lord said, "whoever says, 'You fool!' to his brother, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22).
- ❖ A mature person spiritually is not affected by discouragement like Job who set an example of facing such discouragement "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:9-10).

God works through dysfunctional family situations

- ❖ The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (Psalms 103:6 and 11).
- ❖ God never abandon us in case of stress or depression and He told us that if even a mother can forget her child but He will never forget us.
- ❖ God permits to His beloved children to pass through oppression and distress in order to purify them and to promote them to a better place in heaven and sometimes even here on earth.
- ❖ God gave Hanna, who was distressed by the discouragement of her rival, a great son, Samuel the prophet “And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:6).
- ❖ The righteous Joseph was very mature spiritually when he told his brothers “Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45: 5).

5- Conclusion

- ❖ God likened His love to the kindness of a father and mother, so parents should be very careful lest they offend their children and make them doubt God’s great love.
- ❖ Honoring parents requires love, obedience, respect, gratitude and support. Add to it also success that fills their hearts with joy "the father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him” (Proverbs 23:24).
- ❖ Within the limits of God’s Commandments, you must obey your parents. But, if you are ordered by either of your parents to break one of God’s Commandments, then with a clear conscience, you may discuss it with them, for God requests that you obey them as long as there is no conflict between their orders and His (“The Ten commandments” by HH Pope Shenouda III).

6- Activities / Discussion Points

- ❖ Discuss together how did our great father Jacob caused stumbling to his children by preferring one of them and how this act affected their behavior and harmed even his preferred one “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him” (Genesis 37: 4-5).
- ❖ Discuss the obedience of the Rechabites to their great grandfather and how they have been rewarded from God (Jeremiah 35: 1-11, 18-19).