



Lively Stones | PETER 2:5

Holding forth the word of life

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Cutting the Apron Strings

(Part 1)

By Elder Sherman Ong

" *And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (Matthew 19:5-6)

Biblically speaking, we are told by the Lord Jesus as he quoted Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5-6 and Mark 10:7 that a man shall leave his father and mother upon marriage and be cleave to his wife to form a new family unit for the testimony and glory of God. This is a good biblical definition for "cutting the apron strings". Marriage signifies a time in life for two persons to be leaving their own immediate family to start a new one. In one sense, it is cutting away from their dependence and reliance upon their respective immediate family (parents in particular) to start a new union together. The Lord pronounce here, "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19:6)

The Apostle Paul quoting our Lord Jesus Christ and Moses as he wrote to the Ephesians, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." (Ephesians 5:31) Hence, at the appropriate time, one should be prepared and ready to cut the apron strings from one's parents to initiate a new bond of love with one's spouse. If we take cutting the apron strings in this sense, then, one should only leave and cleave upon marriage. However, in today's context and especially in many parts of the western society and culture, cutting the apron strings can be as early as 16 years of age. Cutting the apron strings is a milestone that signifies independence for our youths. In western society, even if the teen child chooses to stay with their parents, they are expected to contribute to family expenses in the form of rental fee as well. To the western parents, the teen child should learn to have financial independence and not to be a burden to them. Consequently, these teen children behave as if that they are no more under the care and guidance of their parents. Some even seek occasions to rebel and disobey their parents.

In Asian culture, it is not very common for children to leave their family until they get married. Asian parents have the concept of providing for their children until they become

ready to start their own family through marriage. Unlike their western counterpart, Asian teen children do not expect to pay rental fee to their parents for staying with them. Hence, some observers comment that Asian children tend to take their parents for granted and do not exercise independence when their western counterparts are already doing so. The question is what is right in the eyes of the Lord? Cutting apron strings at the earliest possible point in time like those in the west, or allowing the children to cut off upon marriage as in the case of most Asian practices? In this two-part article, we would like attempt to answer this question in two ways. First, we need to seek biblical injunction and teaching on family relationships. Then, we can attempt to apply these biblical principles into our modern day context. Hence, Part 1 of this article will focus on biblical injunction and examples.

God's Design for a Christian Family

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24)

From the beginning, God has instructed Adam and Eve that a family unit is to be formed between a man and a woman. Let us make no mistake about this biblical injunction. One man and one woman, not man-man, or woman-woman! God's design for the family unit is to have a man loving a woman, and together they may have the fruits of their union bearing children and offspring for the next generation. One of the purposes of marriage is procreation, and legitimately so. However, for reasons only known to God, some couples may not be able to bear their own child. In such situation, the family unit will just consist of husband and wife. For families where God is pleased to bless them with children, then, the family unit is complete with parents and children as the Lord so will.

When do parental responsibilities end? Or do they ever end?

Parents are instructed to "bring them (their children) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

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Cutting the Apron Strings (Part 1)

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This is a large topic and another article to write by itself. However, in this article, we want to apply this biblical injunction to parents that it is their responsibilities to bring up their children properly by providing them with Christian education and academic training so that they can be matured and ready to be a testimony for God in the society they live in. Hence, parents are to provide for the children's needs as long as they are not able to make provision for themselves. Some parents teach their children to be independent and to earn their own pocket money by getting them to engage in house chores, and working part-time when they are of age. That is still part and parcel of nurturing them. Children should not think that now that they have the ability to "earn an income", they can cut their apron strings straightaway. As the children are being trained and taught in the Lord, they should mature in their faith and in their walk in the Lord. Their ability to earn their first dollar is certainly not the first sign of cutting the apron strings.

The next question is: When should the parents cut off their support to their children? Financially speaking, as soon as they are working and getting an income, and financially able to upkeep their daily needs, parents can stop their financial support. By cutting the financial support is also not a sign of cutting the apron strings as their children are still not emotionally and socially independent yet. The children will go through a time of seeking for their life partner through proper dating and courtship process. Parents will still need to provide emotional and moral support to their children till the time when they know that they are emotionally and mentally ready to be on their own. To some parents, the time when their children can totally cut their apron strings is when they have a steady relationship and are preparing for marriage to form a new family unit.

Having discussed the above scenarios, to some parents, even if their children are blessed with holy matrimony and settled down in their new home, they continue to feel responsible for them as parents and will be ever ready to lend their support and assistance when they are called upon. This is not unbiblical though the Bible specifically instructs that one should leave their parents and cleave to their spouse when they are joined together in holy wedlock. As far as parents are concerned, their children will always be children to them till they go home to be with the Lord.

Some Biblical Examples

We have a classic case in Genesis when Abraham went all the way to help Isaac in getting a life partner and thus, helping him to cut the apron strings. Shortly after the Lord has tested Abraham's faith in Genesis 22, Abraham instructed his servant to look for a wife for Isaac: "But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife

unto my son Isaac." (Genesis 2:24) In the same chapter, the happy conclusion was Rebekah was eventually chosen as the wife for Isaac. The Bible tells us: "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." (Genesis 24:67) Isaac cut his apron string since then.

Isaac and Rebekah had Esau and Jacob when Isaac was sixty years old (Genesis 25:26). As the boys grew up, it turned out that Jacob was chosen to continue the holy lineage. Jacob won the birthright from Esau (Genesis 25:33). Isaac had to send Jacob away. The Bible tells us: "And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother." (Genesis 28:5) Here is a case of Jacob having to cut his apron string prematurely before marriage. He was instructed to look up to his uncle Laban and to settle down with him. This is an interesting twist of biblical event as it represents a type of cutting the apron string for modern application.

Later, Jacob married the two daughters of Laban, namely, Leah and Rachel. By the time Joseph was born, Jacob was to be cut off from the apron string from Laban: "And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country." (Genesis 30:25) There is a place for parting as Jacob sought to become independent of his in-laws and establish his own family.

What about the story of Moses? When did he cut off his apron strings? We shall discuss this in part 2 of this article when I seek to apply the biblical injunction and learning from the examples described in this article. One needs to understand why one needs to cut off the apron strings at the strategic point in life. It is a significant milestone of one's life, and it must take place at an establish epoch of time when both parents and children so determine that it is God's timing for them to part. As in some cases, cutting the apron strings does mean severing relationships totally – it was never meant to be so, but it does mean re-prioritising and getting the right focus of who our immediate family members are, and then putting our best effort into making the Christian family unit works. The love between parents and children can never be stopped or severed. Cutting the apron strings means having one's independence from the support of their parents and taking ownership and responsibilities for all the actions and decisions thereafter.

COMING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE : PART TWO OF CUTTING THE APRON STRINGS

Editorial Team:
Mrs Julia Koh, Mrs Selina Lee

Announcements

Teachers' Day Lunch Fellowship

TODAY after Worship Service

Time: 1—3 pm

Venue: Teochew Garden Restaurant, The Concourse, Beach Road