

THE FAMILY OF GOD

**Twenty Ninth Annual
Truth In Love
Lectureship**

Jonathan Burns, Editor

**Hosted by the
East Hill Church of Christ**

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Introduction

One of the greatest needs facing the 21st Century Christian has a very simple solution. We need more time in the Word of God with each other. We live in the entertainment age where conversation, discussion, and group learning has become an item of the past. Jesus declared: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20). The early Church “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). They taught “publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Simply stated, the teaching of the Gospel is the priority of the Church.

One of the greatest needs facing the 21st Century Christian has a very simple solution. We need more time in the Word of God with our families. If a home is based on the teaching of the Bible, the Word of God, then it is a great home. If a home is not based on the teaching of the Bible, then it cannot be a Godly home. The value of a Godly home is underestimated in our society. If our homes are concerned about God’s Word, then they can strike down every enemy that comes to our communities. If the home allows sin to enter then it will reach through our communities. Remember, without the home there might not be a church in just the span of one generation. Without marriage, the rearing of children, and the influence the home has on others, the church would be in despair. Simply stated, the teaching of the Gospel is the priority in the Christian Home.

The Truth In Love Lectureship has a fundamental goal each year: “Help present the Gospel in various forms and various locations each year.” We strive to accomplish this by printing this lectureship book for distribution around the world (Currently: USA, Africa, Philippines, and Singapore). Truth In Love also produces a variety of electronic resources (CD’s, DVD’s Blu-Ray’s, Electronic Books, and USB Drive’s) for distribution of the Lectureship materials. We love the Gospel and desire to help spread the “Good News.”

We extend our deepest appreciation to the Elders, Deacons, and Members of the East Hill Church of Christ. Without them, the Truth In Love Lectureship would be nothing and could not continue. I pray that the East Hill church will continue to grow and to develop its desire to reach out to the entire world by starting right here in Pulaski, Tennessee.

Truth In Love takes time. Therefore, it is vital for me to say thank you to my family. Kelley, Charlie, and Colson understand the time it takes to prepare this book, prepare the things that you cannot see on the surface, and to prepare the direct things you see of Truth In Love. They, without complaint, support my work and Truth In Love like none other.

To the reader, we hope this study will help you better understand this portion of God’s Word. We hope that you will be faithful to Christ and to His Church. We hope that you will strengthen your family and bring others to be followers of Christ. May God bless you as you read “The Family of God.”

Jonathan Burns
Director and Editor

Dedication

There are many people at East Hill who are worthy to be honored in this book dedication. East Hill has a reputation for having many people who are willing to stand up and do what is necessary to support the work of the local church. For the church to be strong it takes strong Christians who are willing to work no matter the task at hand.

This 2019 edition of the Truth In Love Lectureship book is dedicated to the team of people who helped make this book a reality. This book requires a large staff of individuals who proof each manuscript time and time again. All these individuals ensure that these manuscripts can be read all over the world for years to come. It takes a spiritual army to make this book come together.

Linda Ball, Kelley Burns, Jocelyn Capshaw, Beth Cooper, Phil Glover, Alice Gooch, Johnny and Cecilia Jackson, Bonnie Lovett, Tommy and Shelia Price, and Debbie Rogers all deserve a well-deserved and underestimated: Thank You. Your work will reach around the world and help others to see the beauty in God's Word.

It is my desire and prayer that for many years to come this book will find its way into many homes. We pray that many generations will turn these pages and view this book in electronic format will be motivated to follow Christ.

Jonathan Burns
Editor and Director

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Chapter 1

The Importance Of Both Families

Jeremy Thornton



If we began to take a poll and ask what is most important in the lives of those around us, what type of answers do we suppose we might receive? Some may answer “money,” others may say, “occupation,” and then some may suggest “health” is most important in their lives, but how many would answer that which is most important in their lives is the family of God, and second to that is their physical family? It is my observation that both of these families seem to be less and less important in the lives of man as each day passes. The family of God, the church, is losing souls at a rapid pace because her members fail to understand her importance, they fail to let the church influence their lives, they fail to be near to her as often as possible, and begin to forsake the assembling of ourselves, and after a period of time they begin to drift away never to return. Likewise, the physical family is no longer viewed as important as it once was. Many suggest that more than half of all marriages are ending in divorce. The United States Supreme Court has implemented laws that allow for a perverse union to be considered a legal marriage. We have reached a point, it seems, where children

are more and more out of control and the parents are no longer concerned about the well being of their children and cannot provide a steady, stable home for them. Simply put, the image of a family, as God has defined, is all but lost because society has neglected to allow God to be the guide of their lives and have opted for what they think is best for them.

Just as Jeremiah the prophet stated, “The way of man is not within himself” (Jeremiah 10:23), and because we cannot direct our steps we need to seek after the “old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16). We must allow God to be God, listen to what He has said “aforetime” which we have for our learning (Romans 15:4), let God define what is most important, and obey the commands He has given. We need to understand the importance of both families, both spiritual and physical, knowing they are both 1) Ordained by God; 2) Ordered by God; and 3) Obligated to God.

ORDAINED BY GOD

Both families are important because both were ordained by God. The concept of a physical family did not begin by mortal man’s conjuring, deciding what should or should not be, nor did man decide that he was alone and in need of something to complete him. Likewise, the family of God, the church, is not a by-product of man’s choices. There was not a point in history when mankind evolved into free thinking creatures which came to the conclusion that there is a God that deserves our worship, nor did man decide that the church should be designed in such a way that we could bring glory and honor to God through the church. Man did decide that there should be options in how one may worship and serve God, and would do this under the guise of calling themselves a “church.”

The physical family was ordained by God. In the

beginning God created the earth and everything therein. God created light, firmament, seas, earth, grass, herbs, fruits, stars, creatures, and then He created man (Genesis 1). In God's infinite wisdom, He placed everything in order after He had created what it would need to survive, multiply, and be fruitful. After creating man, God says, for the first time, "it is not good," referring to man being alone, and would, therefore, create for him a helpmeet (Genesis 2:18). God has placed man and woman together, and by so doing has laid the blueprint for marriages to come. Because God has given the blueprint for marriage, there cannot and should not be any attempts to recreate or rearrange the foundation that has been set. Man has eternally condemned himself by going beyond the blueprint given by God for marriage (Matthew 19:9). Governments have allowed ungodly unions to be recognized as marriages although God has not given authority for such.

The family of God is an eternal purpose of God, which was created by God before the foundation of the world. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:" (Ephesians 3:10–11) Before God ever created the physical family, He laid the foundation for His family, the church. Before sin had become a reality, a Savior was at the ready. Just as God had physically created the earth, and placed man and woman together, telling them to be fruitful and multiply, He had the intention of Christ and His bride coming into existence and His bride being fruitful and multiplying. God, from the very beginning, had His family in mind, and has

always desired that we be His children. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:14–15). Just as man and woman were placed together, so also was Christ and the church. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). We are familiar with Ephesians 5:23ff which compares Christ and the church to the husband and wife relationship, pointing out that, “...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). Because the church was ordained by God, and belongs to Christ, man cannot attempt to create something new or different from the church. Division and/or separation from the church is condemned in Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:10) Paul was “marveled” that some had been “removed” from the Gospel by a perverted Gospel, which led those that were carried away to be “accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9). The Scriptures emphatically teach the singular nature of the body of Christ (Ephesian 4:4ff; 1 Corinthians 12). We have warning from God that we are not allowed to add to, nor take away from His inspired Word, and those that have tried to create a division of the church will be held accountable on that great Day of Judgment (Revelation 22:18-19). Both the spiritual, and physical

family are important because they were ordained by God.

ORDERED BY GOD

God created the family, and has also given instructions for both the physical, and spiritual family. God's Word is given to man for his benefit (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God's Word has supplied man with all things needed both for our time on earth and after time on earth has ended (2 Peter 1:3).

God has instructed man as it pertains to the physical family. In the beginning God placed man and woman together, giving the order whereby we follow. Man and woman are to be joined together. Homosexual unions are perversions of God's intention for the home. God has ordered that husband and wife are to leave their father and mother and should cleave to their spouse (Genesis 2:24). God has ordered that the wife is to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1) This is something that is not popular among the growing number of feminists, and is seen as "old-fashioned" or "chauvinistic." But the truth of the matter is that this is the order that God has for the home. Wives being submissive to their husbands should not feel as if it were a daunting task if the husbands are loving their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:23). God has ordered that the family is to respect one another. Husbands and wives are to have reverence for one another (Ephesians 5:33). Children are to obey their father and mother, fathers are not to provoke their children, and the children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4). God has also ordered that the family is to remain faithful to one another, not letting man put asunder what God has joined together (Matt. 19:6).

God has also given instructions for the church. Just as God placed man and woman together and would not allow

any other union, He also will not allow any other union than Christ and His church. The church was established, and many responded to the preaching of the apostles, those who obeyed the command to repent and be baptized were added to the church by God. God did not allow the apostles to suggest that man had the right to pick the “church of his choice” as the only church that was in existence was the bride of Christ. There is no other church, no other “foundation” than that which has already been laid, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11, Matthew 16:16-19). God has ordered that those that are espoused to Christ must leave sin and cleave to Jesus Christ. We are commanded to bury our old man of sin in the waters of baptism, mortify the members that are on the earth, and be a new creature for Jesus (Romans 6:3ff; Colossians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20). We cannot allow ourselves to commit spiritual fornication, leaving our first love, but must always be faithful to Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:58). God has ordered that we submit to the authority of Christ and follow His teachings. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter had the bright idea of building three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Christ, but was instructed that Jesus is the One to “hear” (Matthew 17:5), showing Christ’s authority. Jesus was given all authority in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18-19), and it was by this authority that the apostles were to preach the Gospel to the entire world (Colossians 1:23). The Old Law had been done away with, being nailed to the cross, and there was a New Covenant that was now in effect because of the death of the testator (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-17). God has given us instructions, showing the order we are to follow for the family.

OBLIGATED TO GOD

To say that we are obligated to God should be a “no brainer,” and we should not have to take the time to explain how creation is eternally obligated to its Creator, but so many fail to meet their obligations to God. The physical family should be obligated to God because of the blessings He continually bestows upon them. How many people see the family as a blessing from God? How many people take every opportunity to thank God in prayer for the family He has blessed them with? According to the percentage of spouses that are unfaithful, and homes that are broken because of divorce, God is not thanked and people do not realize the obligation they have to God. The vicious cycle of children learning bad habits from unfaithful parents, and danger that history will repeat itself because mother and father have not shown their children how to serve God in the home, is a cycle that must be stopped. The obligation that each family has toward God should be something that is clearly visible in the home. We are supposed to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13ff.), we are supposed to preserve our children’s future by showing them a home that glorifies God, a husband and wife that love each other as Christ loved the church, and we are to be examples to all those around us. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”(Matthew 5:13–16).

We are commanded to be a peculiar people, and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), being obligated to God, being separated from this world as we offer the best we have to God. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:” (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

The church is obligated to God because of the family He has provided us. We have been given a Sacrifice for the sins we have committed because we could not do enough to merit our salvation (Hebrews 9:28-10:2). We have received the love offering of God, making justification possible for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:1-2, 8-10; John 3:16-17). We have been given a family that has no equal in this world. Our family has the ability to take our petitions to the very ear of God (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14; James 5:16). Our family encourages us to be faithful in a world that wants us to fail (Hebrews 10:24-25). Our family may be separated by death, but on that Great Day of Judgment our family will be eternally reunited as we stand face to face with God (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). We have a family that has hope (1 Peter 1:3-5). Our hope is a living hope. Our hope is an eternal hope. Our hope never fades away, it is never corrupted. We have a family that is obligated to God. It may be said that some families are ruined because of selfishness and unfaithfulness, but let it never be said of the family of God that we have failed to be obligated to God. Let us faithfully serve Him until the day that we are told “well done.”

CONCLUSION

May we never forget the importance of both families. The physical family is ordained, ordered, and obligated to God.

The church is the eternal purpose of God, we are given instructions to follow, and we are eternally obligated to serving Him. Thank God for the families He has given to us, and the opportunity we have to be a part of His family because Jesus has died for us and established His church.

Chapter 2

The Future Of Both Families

Bobby Liddell



While no one, but God, knows what the future holds, as the old saying goes, “We know Who holds the future.” Still, we may consider trends, and deduce some possibilities, as to what the future COULD hold--but that is not the purpose of this lecture. Let us, rather, consider how WE may be able to affect the future, by our words and deeds, and help both the church and the home (the two families under consideration) to be ready for the future, and to look confidently beyond time to eternity. With this in view, let us consider how we may prepare both families for the future, and what the future holds (according to God’s Word), for both.

THE FAMILY - THE CHURCH

The church of Christ (cf. Romans 16:16), is that body of baptized believers, who have been called, by the Gospel, out of the world and into Christ; over whom Christ is the Head, and in whom His Spirit dwells (2 Thessalonians 2:14; Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 3:26-27). This God-given church is the family of God. Paul wrote: “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself

in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The word “house” literally means “dwelling place,” but here, used metaphorically, refers to those who dwell in that place; that is, the household; thus, the family. Without question all the saved are in the family of God, the church (Acts 2:47). Therefore, no accountable person is saved outside of the Lord’s church (cf. Ephesians 2:12). There will be nothing, in the future, that will change this truth. Christ promised He would build His church, and He did (Matthew 16:18)!

In God’s plan, the future of the church was determined in the distant past. The church’s existence, importance, and influence were in the mind of God before the foundation of the world; thus, these were in His “eternal purpose” (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:20). By inspiration, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar what would take place hundreds of years in the future, in the time of the fourth world empire; i.e., in the “days” of the Roman kings: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44). The kingdom, of which Daniel spoke, is the church (cf. Matthew 16:16ff).

The church Christ built will stand and continue, but the future of the local congregation very much depends upon what brethren in the local congregation do today, or maybe even what they did twenty years ago, and, of course, what they do in the future, such as there may be (cf. 2 Peter 3:9ff). Sound congregations existing today may grow and prosper, as we all hope and pray, or they may lose their way, become complacent, quit evangelizing, follow a false teacher, be led astray by an unfaithful eldership, or just simply fail to

make sufficient plans for the successful continuance of the congregation in the days ahead. The result may well be the decline, loss, or even apostasy of that local congregation. What a sad future! Many of us have seen this very sad ending to what had once been a thriving congregation. The church that once was a beacon of light to the community now is no more, and a dilapidated building is the only sign of its existence.

THE FAMILY - THE HOME

Just as God had a plan for the church, so He had a plan for the home. Man's home/family was the culminating creative act of that which God declared to be "very good" (Genesis 1-2). Consider the inspired record of God's creation of man. God created man in His own image, looked upon His creation and, "behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:26-31). However, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone," so, God brought before Adam every living creature, but "there was not found an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18-20). So, He put Adam to sleep, took a rib from him, and made Eve, of whom Adam said, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:21-23). God made them male and female and called their name Adam (Genesis 5:1-2; Matthew 19:4). Given God's creation of man and woman for each other, His law for marriage is: "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).

God placed sex (and childbearing) within the bounds of marriage, and there only (Genesis 4:1). God instituted marriage with these parameters. Marriage involves one man and one woman, both of whom are eligible to marry according to God's law. God's law does not allow any other arrangement. Marriage means a man and a woman leave their parents to be

with each other, no longer to be two, but to become one flesh (Matthew 19:5-6). Marriage means a man and a woman cleave (literally, are glued together) to each other, joined together by God, and, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19.6). As commonly quoted marriage vows truly state, marriage means forsaking all others and keeping oneself only unto his/her mate.

Within the holy bonds of matrimony, and there alone, should there be conception. In the family is where God put child rearing, and by doing so, filled the home with joy and love. How blessed is the child whose parents brought him forth in purity, and continue to teach, train, instruct, and correct him in a God-ordained, God-approved, God-centered home!

THE FUTURE OF BOTH FAMILIES

We want to be positive in our approach to the future of the church and the home! In view of the significant social changes engineered by evil men and women, who feed upon the dangerous, deadly fare of postmodernism that threatens the very foundations of all aspects of society, and which social changes ungodly men, in their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, as ungodly sinners, because of their ungodly lusts, have cheerfully embraced (Jude 4, 15, 18), we could become discouraged, even to the point of saying, “What’s the use?”

Rather, let us consider what positive steps we can take today, and in days following, that will insure, at least to the best of our ability, a better future--the best future--for the church and the home. **TO INSURE THE BEST FUTURE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE HOME, WE MUST TAKE SERIOUSLY OUR RESPONSIBILITIES--EVEN:**

WHEN THE BURDEN IS HEAVY

Families take work and a lot of it! I remember, as an electrician, when I worked six days a week, every week, and a couple of double shifts each week. I was working eight “days” a week. After a while, that got to be old, and I grew weary. It was a challenge to stay motivated because the burden was heavy, and the road seemed very long. The same can happen in our families. The work is really regular! The weight of the load grows. Motivation can be a problem.

Love motivates us. God bless good, godly wives and mothers who labor tirelessly without complaint--because they are motivated by love for their families. The “virtuous woman,” whose “price is far above rubies,” was a great blessing to her family (Proverbs 31). She toiled early and late, in various areas of responsibility, because she loved her family (and her God who gave her family to her). Note this complimentary description of such a woman: “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” (Proverbs 31:27-31).

When we have that same love for the church and the home, we will find the burden is so much lighter, the way so much brighter, and the joy so much greater.

Elders bear a heavy burden, and are often criticized, but seldom complimented. This ought not to be (1 Timothy 5:17 ASV). They give an account for our souls (Hebrews 13:17)! What greater responsibility could there be than being an elder in the Lord’s church (as is also shown by the very

qualifications required [1 Timothy 3; Titus 1])? Yet, how very important are elders to the family of God (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)! Sometimes, good men refuse the work because they consider the weighty responsibility to be too much. Sometimes, those in the office give up when the burden gets “too heavy” for them, but their giving up may open the door to a Diotrephes, and the family of God might suffer ruin, as a result.

So, how can we prepare both families for the future—in a positive way? We must be strong, and ready to bear the burdens that come with the family (Philippians 4:13). When we do so with love, we will find they are not burdens at all, and we will also find that, as a family, we bear those burdens together (Galatians 6:2). The future will be bright when we determine there is NO burden too heavy when it comes to family.

WHEN THE COST IS HIGH

According to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the average cost of rearing a child, in America, from birth to 17 years old, is \$233,160 (based upon numbers from 2015). That may seem a little low to some of us. Caring for an aged, infirm parent may well reach into hundreds of thousands of dollars cumulatively. Shall we place a dollar amount upon the worth of a child, or any other family member? Certainly, not! So, we plan and budget, and we work and adjust, so that we can take care of those whom we love so dearly.

High cost may be totally disassociated from financial assets. The toll may be an emotional one. “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (cf. Luke 22:44). How many times has the preacher prayed with tears because of his concerns for a lost soul, or an angry brother, or an immoral sister, or a “church problem,” etc.?

How many times has a loving father spent sleepless nights so worried over a “lost boy” (Luke 15:11ff)? What about the wife who wants so badly for her husband to be saved, and to be the father to their children he ought to be, and the head of the house as God designed (Ephesians 5:22-6:4)? Yes, the cost may be high--too high for some, and they give up, and the future looks bleak. The future will be bright when we determine there is NO cost too high when it comes to family.

WHEN THE WAY IS HARD

The burdens we are called upon to bear, and the costs we must pay add up to making the way hard. Although most would think that walking uphill is harder than walking downhill, studies have shown that is not always the case. So, when we decide the way that leads us UP to Heaven is too hard, we need to realize that the way that leads DOWN is much harder. Consider Proverbs 13:15: “Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.” The word “hard,” means a dry, rocky, barren path. Such a path is without the comfort, companionship, and compassion that the way of light offers. Sometimes, when the way seems hard, a spouse bails out, a parent walks away, a preacher “takes his hand off the plough.”

For the sakes of our families, we must keep our feet pointing in the right direction, our eyes upon the goal, our hearts determined, and our hopes undiminished. Joyfully, we stride purposefully along the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). With Christ, we can face every obstacle, and overcome it. Remember what Paul wrote: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”

(Philippians 3:13-14). So, for the future of both families, let us “press toward the mark.” The future will be bright when we determine there is NO way too hard when it comes to family.

WHEN THE ROAD IS LONELY

On the sidewalks of Hong Kong, I was with hundreds (seemed like thousands) of people. I did not know a one of them, and they did not know me. I could not have communicated with most of them. In that “sea of humanity,” I was all alone. The paradox is that families, where togetherness is the watchword, can be the loneliest places on earth. How many sit in church buildings, with two hundred people, and are still all alone? How many exist in families where the family members are so detached, they hardly know each other--as if they were strangers? Sadly, loneliness does not diminish just because of the physical nearness of others.

Godliness may bring us to the point where we must address loneliness (cf. Luke 6:22). When the majority takes the wrong course; when loved ones shun us because we will not participate in their worldliness--we may find ourselves alone in a crowd. The problem may not be an action against us, but a lack of understanding on the part of ourselves and others, concerning relationships and responsibilities, that passively results in loneliness. God has already answered the question we have yet to ask. He designed both church and home to be “support groups,” where faith, hope, and love unite us, where each member contributes to the proper functioning of all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, especially v. 20), and where, “Blest Be The Tie That Binds.” Should we find ourselves feeling lonely, instead of withdrawing into a world of self-pity, let us reach out to form ties of mutuality, finding the fellowship and support that come when WE extend fellowship and support (1 John 1:7).

Still, if we must travel the road of righteousness “all alone,” let us do so with the knowledge that God, Who will never leave us, or forsake us, is with us (Hebrews 13:5), and, that in reality, there are others traveling the same road we are traveling. The future of both families will be bright when we determine there is NO road too lonely when it comes to family.

WHEN IT IS NOT CONVENIENT TO DO SO

The excuse of inconvenience is such that we may not even realize we have surrendered to the point of giving in. We all know the classic biblical example of the Roman procurator, Felix. As Paul, “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). As far as we know, that convenient season never did come. How like Felix are so many! The husband/father, who never finds it “convenient” to rear his children (as God commanded him to do), or to cherish his wife (as God commanded him to do), will miss ballgames, stand up his wife, be an absentee in the family--and one day have the deepest regret that he cannot remove, or resolve.

It is not always convenient to be in a family, but the problem is not the family. That is a blessing! The problem is when our hearts are pulled two ways (like in Matthew 6:24; cf. James 1:8), and the root of that problem is the challenge to be selfless instead of selfish. It may not be convenient to care for that child, spouse, or parent, but love trumps inconvenience. It may not be convenient to nurture that young Christian, to listen patiently to a broken-hearted sister, or to bear, with longsuffering, the struggles of a weak brother, but love trumps inconvenience. The future will be bright when we determine there is NO “inconvenience” too great when it comes to family.

CONCLUSION

To insure the best future for the church and the home, we must take seriously our responsibilities--even: when the burden is heavy, the cost is high, the way is hard, the road is lonely, and it is not convenient to do so. Alone, no one person can secure a desirable future for the church or the home, but when each one determines to do his part, together, we can work toward the future God desires for us--and what a bright future that will be!

Chapter 3

Loving The Lord's People

Jimmy Clark



The people of God are special to the Lord himself. It is written of the sacrifice of the Savior, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14, KJV). The phrase “peculiar people” in the Greek text means “that which is one’s own, belongs to one’s possessions” (Thayer, p. 504). Hence, it comes to mean a people selected from all others to be God’s own possession. The expression goes back to the Old Testament image of God’s choosing of Israel above all nations to bring his plan into existence. Moses stated to the nation, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:4-5). Again, “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6; cf. Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18). The book

of Deuteronomy gives special attention to the love that God had for his people. "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Such a background sets the stage for the emphasis of the nation's love for God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5) and the nation's love for one another (cf. Leviticus 19:18) and even to love the stranger like himself (cf. Leviticus 19:34). Therefore, loving the Lord's people today has characteristics that model the love that God has for his own people: the church. This concept will now be explored from three aspects.

BEHAVING LIKE GOD BEHAVES

The apostle John wrote a great deal about love and especially loving one another. One cannot find a better example of how to love than the model of God found in Jesus. One of the great sections on love is toward the close of Jesus' earthly ministry. John wrote in his gospel, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). John's record of those intimate words to His apostles the night before He was to die the next day stresses the love of the Father for the Son, the love of the Son for his disciples and the love that the disciples were to have for one another. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my

disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). While love for others was an old command being the second greatest command, loving like Jesus loved them raised the standard. Jesus stated further concerning his own love, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (John 15:9). Here is the chain of love that binds God to his people and the people of God to God and to each other. The Father loved Jesus. Jesus loved the disciples. The disciples are to continue in such love toward the Father, the Son and each other. Notice again, the emphasis Jesus gives: “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:17). When Jesus closes his words with the great prayer to the Father for unity (cf. John 17:20-22), he says, “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:23-26). It is striking that Jesus begins and ends with the love the Father has for him moving to the love that Jesus showed his disciples. Such was to make an impact on the hearts and lives of those men to carry over to all who would become followers of Jesus. John wrote in his epistles, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of

stumbling in him” (1 John 2:9-10). John solidifies the central message of the life of children of God where he wrote, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:10-14). The extension of such love is seen in the following statements by John, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18). John presses the point further about love for one another being first found in God and being the source of all love. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Again, “Beloved, If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:11-12). He closes his points about love with these words, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him. That he

who loveth God love his brother also. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 4:20-5:2).

BEING BRETHREN IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

The New Testament is filled with passages that stress the love that is to take place between brethren. Having a common heavenly Father through the Son makes the relationships in the church take on a family atmosphere. Peter wrote, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22). Peter further exhorts, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:17). And one more time Peter stresses, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8). The emphasis of love under the figure of a brotherhood goes back to the days of old. Abraham stated to Lot in view of the conflict between his herdsmen and Lot’s, “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren” (Genesis 13:8). Moses said to two Israelites who were striving, “And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong. Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?” (Exodus 2:13). Stephen referenced this case, where he said, “And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?” (Acts 7:26).

One can see from such statements that the relationship of brethren should manifest itself in a specific kind of behavior. This behavior as brethren is spelled out in various specific ways in other passages. Paul gave many exhortations to various congregations concerning this love for brethren. Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, saying, "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:9-10). Again, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10). Paul wrote to the Galatians, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Galatians 5:13-14). Paul wrote to the Ephesian brethren, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2). Again, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). And finally, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear

children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). Paul wrote to the Colossian brethren, “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Colossians 2:1-2). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). And further, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Finally, when the Hebrews were being exhorted to hold to their confidence in Christ (cf. Hebrews 3:6, 14), they were equally exhorted, “Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1). One cannot help but be impressed throughout the New Testament with the strong emphasis on brotherly love.

BECOMING SPIRITUALLY MATURE UNTO A HEAVENLY HOME

Peter wrote in his second writing to the brethren about spiritual growth. “And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to

patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-11). It is to be noted as far as this lecture is concerned that one cannot have full spiritual maturity with the expectation of heaven without the qualities of brotherly kindness and love. Hence, loving the Lord's people and even going beyond in love to those that may not even love you back are qualities of entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Heaven.

There are some noteworthy examples in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, which would illustrate such maturity and heavenly-mindedness. It always helps to see examples of those who understood the need for applying the will of God to life to understand how commands have practical application.

Two examples in the Old Testament worthy of note are Hosea and David. The Lord said to Hosea in taking back his estranged wife, “Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine” (Hosea 3:1). It is noteworthy to see that the love which Hosea was to show toward his wife is parallel to the love of God toward Israel. While such would be difficult to do from a human standpoint, it was to be done by Hosea and was done (cf. Hosea 3:3). Here is a spiritual maturity that

excelled anything that was present in Israel at the time.

When looking at the life of David, one finds a growing maturity of love between David and Jonathan. While such should have produced a bitter rivalry as was the case with Saul toward David, such was never the case with Jonathan. The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). Here is a clear picture of brotherly love. Here is a true illustration of loving the Lord's people. After the death of Jonathan, David said, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). Love transcends all things, even in death.

When looking at the New Testament there are references to congregations and individuals who manifested a great love of God's people. Paul wrote of the Ephesians, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15-16). Paul wrote of the Colossians, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints" (Colossians 1:3-4). The New Testament references to Paul's love of the brethren cover virtually every book written by him. Paul even wrote concerning Philemon, "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Philemon 4-5). Truly, the signs of spiritual maturity are found when the love of the saints is present in the lives of God's people. The love for the brethren while here on earth is but a foretaste of the greater love to be found in heaven.

Chapter 4

Loving The Lord's Leaders



Keith Mosher, Sr.

Solomon wrote: “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (Proverbs 8:11; KJV). Wisdom is one of the greatest needs in the church and especially in her leadership. Trying to navigate the pathways of this chaotic world, many find themselves at a loss as to what to do next. And, far too many of the actions of leaders are not premeditated, but are made instinctively and many congregations exist without any concept of what their purposes are or where they are going.

God ordained that there be a group of wiser, experienced men as leaders in every congregation (Acts 14:22; 20:28; Philippians 1:1). In order for the church to function properly, these leaders must practice Godly wisdom: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

However, there are two kinds of wisdom; one (already noted) is from above and the other is worldly:

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work (James 3:13-16).”

Our loving Father instructed His children to pray for the right kind of wisdom (James 1:5). And, in order to love our leaders, it is important to pray for wisdom for them and to use James 3:17 as a guide as to what to pray for them; if we love them enough to want the best for them in their work and in their lives.

LOVING OUR LEADERS MEANS PRAYING FOR THEIR PURITY

A leader is to be “blameless;” that is, above reproach. The word, blameless, is *anepileetos*, in the Greek, and means “not open to censure, irreprouchable” (Vine 133). The term translated pure at James 3:17 is “*hagnos*, pure from defilement, not contaminated (from the same root as *hagios*, holy)” (Ibid. 913). The concept for elders, then, is that they are not sinless, but they are penitent and live in such a way as to have a good report from those around them. Therefore, those who love their leaders will be praying for them to be pure in conduct and that their motives will not be mixed. Paul wrote: “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17).

Loving one's leaders is much more easily done when they are pure of mind and not easily distracted by the world (cf. Philippians 4:8). Leaders, to whom one goes for counsel, are loved for their work's sake and are appointed because they would never lead others into sin. In fact, in referencing the appointment of elders, Paul insisted that they not be put "suddenly" into the work, for others will be following their examples (1 Timothy 5:22). Those who love their leaders rejoice in that they "run with patience the race that is set before them" and they pray that the leaders will continue such to the end (Hebrews 12:1b).

LOVING OUR LEADERS MEANS PRAYING AND WORKING FOR PEACE

The apostle to the Gentiles penned: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which are among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Not only should elders not be quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3), but brethren should not be bickering troublemakers, who cause the leaders constant headaches. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for this is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

The term, rule, in Hebrews 13:17 above, is *egeomai*, in the original and Buchsel says of this Greek word that it means:

...to lead, to think, to believe, to regard.
It is mostly in the plural and is used for the
leaders of the community. The community is

obviously divided into those who lead and those who are led. In Hebrews 13:17 they are elders responsible to God. God has entrusted the other members of the community to them, and therefore these owe them obedience (907).

Vine adds that *egeomai* also has the sense of guiding (989). If one is following a leader, placed ahead by God, how much love is owed that elder who is guiding one to heaven? How hard should each member of a congregation work to ensure peace and harmony in the local area? A good question to ask for every Christian would be: "Am I a part of the problem, or am I a part of the solution?"

Notice that Paul told the Thessalonian brethren to know the elders (1 Thessalonians 5:12a) and the word know is "from *oida* meaning to see, from the root *eidon*, in the sense of knowing the elders from observation or understanding of their work" (Vine 638). A member of the church, who loves the leaders, will always be aware of his relationship to the elders and be in submission to their biblical guidance. [A member told me years ago that the elders had no rule over him, for he was a free citizen of God's kingdom. His statement was lacking in love for faithful elders and their God-given tasks.] All members of the church should love the elders enough to know that Christians must avoid all actions that "do gender strifes" (KJV). [Translated as "do breed quarrels" (ESV).] Loving congregations are a great joy to lead.

LOVING OUR LEADERS MEANS PRAYING FOR THEIR GENTLENESS

The wisdom that is from above is "gentle" (James 3:17b). In order really to love the elders, one must pray for

their gentle behavior and admire this quality in them. It is very hard to appreciate an elder who must “grab the bull by the horns” and always have his way, or else he gets angry. In fact, such a disposition actually disqualifies one from being a leader (1 Timothy 3:3). Vine noted:

Epious, mild, gentle, was frequently used by Greek writers as characterizing a nurse with trying children or a teacher with refractory scholars, or of parents toward their children. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 the Apostle uses it of the conduct of himself and his fellow-missionaries towards the converts at Thessalonica; in 2 Timothy 2:14 of the conduct requisite for a servant of the Lord (485).

Note the following: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:14). Imagine trying to love an impatient, harsh leader or teacher, but those leaders who are gentle deserve love and consideration for taking on the huge task of overseeing God’s church (Acts 20:28). May the Lord give us thousands of gentle, patient leaders whom we can lovingly follow.

LOVING OUR LEADERS IS EASY WHEN THEY ARE OPEN TO REASON

James spoke of the wisdom that is from above as “easy to be entreated” (James 3:17c). It is so easy to love those who listen to us, is it not? That elder, who knows that he does not know it all and is continuing to learn as he leads, is quite worthy of our love and our prayers. Elders are, and should be, teachers (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). Therefore, they must

do more than listen. They often must speak. [It is odd to this preacher that elders call him to come and fill in when their preacher is away. I love to preach when asked, but are they not apt to teach?]

However, even though elders must speak, it is also essential that elders be good listeners and be quick to follow James admonition to be “swift to hear” (James 1:19). Elders who are open to reason; easily persuaded by good sense; reaching for God’s Word when decisions are to be made; and aware of being rational are easy to love; greatly to be encouraged, and constantly in our prayers.

LOVING OUR LEADERS MEANS RESPONSIBILITY ON THEIR PARTS

Paul made it very clear that preachers, especially, and church members by application, have a very specific role concerning elders. “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:19-20). It is rather remarkable that weaved into the very fabric of the local church is the concept that loving the elders does not mean not holding them accountable for personal sins. Elders are, therefore, not above the evaluation of those they serve, and loving them enough to admonish them and saving their souls is a great love indeed.

Church members are intimately connected as a family, and it is unfortunate that elders are often ignored by the members as if the leaders were “a cut above” spiritually and never in need of correction. [I “went forward” several years ago because I needed the prayers of the church at that time in my life. A sister told me after the assembly was over that “I should not ever go forward, for I was a preacher!”]

Preachers and leaders are mere men and even the apostle Paul recognized his shortcomings (Philippians 3:13-14).] Elders must maintain the qualifications all of the time that they serve, and sometimes those who love them will need to correct them. [I got a phone call one evening and had to go to the local jail and bail out an elder who was charged with, and guilty of, drunk driving! He repented and gave up drinking. As far as I know, he is still faithful to the Lord, although not serving as an elder. Suppose I had just told everyone and had also left him in jail. Would I have practiced love toward him?]

There are over fifty “one-another” passages in the New Testament and all of us should be aware of helping a fallen brother (James 5:19-29; Galatians 6:1). Those who love “one-another” will include the elders in that adoration. In fact, it is obvious from 1 Timothy 5:20 that there is a stricter rule for dealing with the errors of leaders, because elders carry a greater risk of losing their souls, even than the members do (James 3:1; Hebrews 13:17)! With greater responsibility, however, comes greater accountability, and those who love the elders recognize the pressures on these men, pray for them constantly, and love them enough to want them to go to heaven too.

LOVING OUR LEADERS WHO ARE PRACTICAL

True wisdom in leading others is always practical. I do not mean pragmatic here, for the latter term carries the concept of compromise in it. By practical I mean that an elder’s wisdom can be seen in his actions for he is: “full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17d). The elder, who practices godly wisdom, produces mercy, impartiality, and total honesty.

Is it not easy to love someone who is merciful? In

fact, Jesus commented on how easy it is to adore such: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same” (Matthew 5:46)? A leader who is merciful will draw others to him, and they will love him. Paul spoke of those who are “by the book men” without mercy and labeled them as “righteous” (Romans 5:7b). The apostle added that: “scarcely for a righteous man would one dare to die” (Romans 5:7c). Who would want to give his life for one who lacked mercy? But merciful elders will obtain mercy, for they are emulating the Lord Himself (2 Corinthians 1:3) and those who love the Lord will extend that love to such compassionate leaders.

Most parents realize that partiality is bad when dealing with children. Did not Jacob cause severe problems in his family by elevating Joseph above his brothers (Genesis 37:4)? For parents, and especially for elders, impartiality is so important that it must be practiced. It is bad enough when parents play favorites, but it is extremely poor leadership when elders are partial; the whole church suffers when elders only visit those they “like,” or those who give them no problems. Elders worthy of the love of the members are those who superintend the whole “flock” (Acts 20:28).

God is “without respect of persons” (1 Peter 2:17; Galatians 2:6; Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34; Luke 20:21; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). Christians who love their leaders will pray that they practice the wisdom of impartiality and that the leaders will be fair and loving toward all (cf. James 2:1, 9; 1 Timothy 5:21).

Also, elders who practice God’s wisdom will be sincere or, as the King James Version has it: “without hypocrisy” (James 3:17e). As noted above, the first thing about God’s wisdom stated is that it is pure and the latter term literally

means “without hypocrisy!” Elders are much to be loved when they practice what they preach and are “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Elders who do not peddle the Word of God in order to be popular (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:17 noted above); that is, who are free from people-pleasing and anxiety about public relations are to be loved for their work, their attitudes, their love for the truth, and their “backbones” when attacked by those who do not love the Lord’s church or Bible ways.

Elders are to be loved who never spin, wrest, or deceive with the scriptures. Such leaders are adored because they do not tamper with God’s Word but teach it as it is written and demand that all do the same (2 Corinthians 4:2).

CONCLUSION

It seems trite to write on loving the elders of the congregation. Is it not the case that Christians are to “love one another” (John 13:34)? But, maybe we have, in our thoughts, placed the elders in “another” spiritual category from “our” brethren and rather ignored their needs. I hope such is not the case, but if it is, then let us learn to know the leaders; let us pray for them; and let us love them.

We love the leaders who seek God’s wisdom (James 3:17). For such elders are pure in their thoughts and motives. We love the elders enough to practice keeping the peace in the congregation and praying that they, too, will avoid breeding quarrels. Gentle elders are easy to love, as are those who are open to reason. Perhaps the greatest quality to be admired in leaders is the lack of hypocrisy, and the latter is akin to the first one above, purity.

May God help us to love good, faithful leaders, and may they respond in kind to our care for them. After all, they are the shepherds of our souls (I Peter 5:1-3).

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Chapter 5

Loving The Lord's Word

Tony Lawrence



And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” so says the Psalmist in (Psalms 119:47–48). He continues, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalms 119:97). Perhaps no section of the Bible reflects a love for the Word of the Lord more than this. One should not find this odd since the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1) was also a man after God’s own heart (2 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). He loved God and everything He said.

In God’s family we treasure His words. In this lesson it will be our task to focus on the legacy provided for us by Jesus and His love for God’s word followed by a discussion of one’s longing for that glorious word. One who loves God’s word will be involved in listening and learning from the life-giving word by living it daily.

LEGACY

Many families enjoy a very rich legacy. Solomon

said, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children..." (Proverbs 13:22). Some families have been left with great riches while others have been left with a good name. Perhaps the greatest of benefits is the wise counsel and advice given by those fathers (and mothers). A number of us would love to be able to speak once more with our wise parents and grandparents who have gone before us.

A legacy can be seen easily in numerous families. For instance, consider the Bush family with Senator Prescott Bush followed by his son President George H.W. Bush and then grandson President George W. Bush, along with his brother Governor Jeb Bush. That family has a strong legacy of public service. The voices of those great family leaders still resonate with the descendants. Biblically speaking, there have likewise been some powerful voices of faith that have endured for future generations. The writer of Hebrews spoke of the faith of Abel saying, "he being dead yet speaketh." (Hebrews 11:4). Perhaps one of the best illustrations of this point found in the Old Testament is Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the descendants of Rechab. God used them as an example of how Israel should listen to His words. The Rechabites refused to do what had been forbidden by their father. Jeremiah records them as saying, "we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us" (Jeremiah 35:8). In the New Testament Timothy serves as a young man greatly influenced by the legacy of a faithful teaching by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul writes, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Our spiritual family legacy is incomparable. God has spoken and Jesus has shown us how precious is that voice from Him. As in every area of life, the Lord left an example for one to follow (1 Peter 2:21). He demonstrated a matchless love for the Father and His word. Jesus stated:

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me” (John 14:23–24).

He always did what pleased the Father (John 8:29), not seeking His own will but that of the Father (John 5:30). His greatest proof of that was in His resolve to do the Father’s will even when it was difficult to do so. The night of the Lord’s betrayal was marked with deep dread for the pain that was coming with His passion on the cross. He prayed fervently for the cup to pass but was committed to obeying the voice of the Father. “But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (John 14:31).

As a family we are deeply blessed to have preserved for us the voice of God recorded in written form. (cf. Exodus 17:14; 34:27; Jeremiah 30:2; 36:2; Habakkuk 2:2; Revelation 1:11, 19). That same word is just as powerful and authoritative as when it was first delivered orally. The Hebrew writer stressed, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1), followed

by, "...which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Hebrews 2:3). Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided into all truth and reminded of all the things he taught (John 16:13; 14:26; Ephesians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:21). Thus, one today can still hear the voice of the Lord. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25).

LONGING

The Psalmist proclaimed his great desire for God's word, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psalm 119:20). "I opened my mouth and panted: for I longed for thy commandments" (Psalm 119:131). "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight" (Psalm 119:174). The Psalmist frequently used figures of speech to indicate just how much he loved and even craved God's word. He frequently expressed such in terms of a desire for food or precious metals. "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10). "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm. 119:103). Likewise, he also expressed such in terms of the desire for precious metal. "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Psalm. 119:72). "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psalm. 119:127). The great man Job likewise stated it well in his pursuit of understanding his plight: "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

In the New Testament Jesus continued with the same idea in the Beatitudes, that one should “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). Recorded in the book of Hebrews is a figure of those who have had a taste of the word. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Hebrews 6:4–5). The intensity of one’s desire will reveal how much effort he is willing to put forth to obtain and keep it. To the Jews questioning Jesus and His message He said, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). If they only had the proper desire, they could know that His doctrine was from God. Sadly, as was the case then, some just don’t want to know the Word of God well enough. Jesus also used the illustration of one seeking for beautiful pearls and having found the “one pearl of great price” sold everything to buy it (Matthew 13:45-46). The Truth is to be “bought.” “Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23). Judah demonstrated in the days of the prophets that they valued the Word of God very little. Isaiah recorded of their view of God’s word, “But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isaiah 28:13). Jeremiah added, “...behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it” (Jeremiah 6:10). Hosea continued, “I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing” (Hosea 8:12). “Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear

the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 7:12). History tells us that their failure to love God's Word resulted in their downfall and bondage. The same principle is captured by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians, "and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). If one only knew how precious is the Word of God, it truly would be his desire all the day long.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

In His rebuke of the Jews Jesus said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word" (John 8:43). Previously He had told them that "my word hath no place in you" (John 8:37). Many people believe they already know what is contained in God's Word before ever hearing it. Men pre-judge or have prejudice against what they think the Lord has said and have no interest in listening to it. While the message of God is for all, not everyone will embrace it. Jesus, Himself, said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). If one would only listen and learn!

Perhaps the reason many have failed to love the word of God is a failure to understand it. Many children learn too late to appreciate the wisdom of their parents. Only after the passing of their parents and grandparents do they long to be able to hear the voice of their parents once again. The solution is to listen and learn to God's word early in life. Solomon would say, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when

thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Jesus said to “take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18) and “take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24). How does one listen to God? Is it to find justification for what one does? Is it to pick and choose which parts one wants to obey? Is one listening to what God has said or simply man’s representation of it? Many religious people proclaim they love God and His Word but is their knowledge and obedience of it reflected in their actions? It doesn’t take one long reading the Gospel accounts to realize the hollow claims of the religious elites of Jesus’ day. Jesus explained that the parables, while revealing, also concealed from those who had no desire to hear and understand.

“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:13–15).

Jesus said that His word would judge them. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

LIFE GIVING

Jesus said, “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). Peter understood it. “Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). The Psalmist wrote, “I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me” (Psalm 119:93). If men would only appreciate what God’s word can do in their lives here and the life which it brings eternally. Jesus explained:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:24–25).

James also put it very simply, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). What God has recorded for man is how to overcome the result of sin and its consequences. God’s Word explains what sin is (Romans 7:7; 1 John 3:4), how sinful it is (Romans 7:13) and what it will ultimately do to man (Romans 6:23). Thankfully, however, recorded in God’s Word is His love for man and desire to save him (John 3:16; Romans 1:15-17).

As one explores the life-giving features of the Word the “manifold wisdom” of God shines (Ephesians 3:10). The words provide everything needed for “life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). David captured this so well in the nineteenth Psalm:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7–11).

And again in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm:

“Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts” (Psalm 119:98–100).

LIVING

One who loves God and His word will want to live it each and every day. What follows are some recommendations for loving and living the word.

ONE: Read, study and meditate upon what God has said. Paul told Timothy to “... give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13). Nine times in the Psalms David speaks of meditating upon the law of God (Psalms 1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148; 143:5).

The first instance captures the idea so well, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2). Jesus would challenge those questioning Him if they had "not read" (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31). He would also ask, "He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?" (Luke 10:26).

TWO: Memorize important portions of what God has said. Today it is not uncommon to hear quotations of famous men. For instance, President Franklin Roosevelt is often quoted, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." (History Matters, online). However great men are and whatever truth they may discover, nothing compares with the infallible Word of God. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Psalm 139:17). David must have committed many of the words of God to memory. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

THREE: Respect the words of God. One can easily see the person who honors and respects the words of another. Whether it is the words of a parent in the home, a teacher in the school or a supervisor at work, when one berates and belittles the given instructions they show disrespect. It is distressing to see the attitude of Israel following the return from the captivity. Malachi records God's rebuke, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" (Malachi 1:6).

FOUR: Finally, if one truly loves God's Word he will not want to keep it to himself. It is too important and valuable to not share it with others. The four lepers at the

gate of Samaria who discovered the deserted Syrian army camp realized the obligation they had to let others know it had been abandoned. “Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household” (2 Kings 7:9).

CONCLUSION

In God’s family we care about what our Heavenly Father has said. We prize and treasure every word. It is, as was promised through Jeremiah, a law that was written in the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16). We further show our love for that precious Word by doing what it says, “But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (Deuteronomy 30:14).

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Chapter 6

The Attitudes Needed In The Church

Mike Hixon



The old cliché is true, “Attitude is everything.” Championships are sometimes won or lost because of attitude. Corporate America is full of successful CEO’s, managers, salespeople, etc., who demonstrate a “can’t fail” attitude. Students who excel academically are driven to give their best in the classroom because of attitude.

Developing and maintaining the right attitude is essential to the spiritual growth and well-being of an individual Christian and congregation. The early church thrived because of the attitude of her members. Granted, the apostolic church was not infallible, but those who manifested the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5) were intent on turning a pagan world upside down (Acts 17:6). They were motivated by intense love for the Lord and zealous in their defense and proclamation of the gospel to a lost and dying world. The attitude of the saints in the first century is sorely needed in the twenty-first century church. With that in mind, let us develop the assigned subject, “The Attitudes Needed in the Church.”

PASSION FOR THE LORD

Centuries ago the Lord asked the apostle Peter, “do you love Me” (John 21:17). The relevance of this question is reflected in the fact that our love for the Lord will determine how much or how little we do for His cause. It sets the tone for everything. The “great commandment” still reads, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

The catalyst for loving God is recognizing the depth of His love for us. Jesus, in what has been called “the Golden Text” of the Bible said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). In declaring the great love of God, John wrote, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is the love of God, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). Note the emphasis by John, “He (God) loved us.” In light of the marvelous matchless love of God, John said, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

The apostle Paul was a courageous soldier of the cross. His life was one of sacrifice and service on behalf of the Lord He loved. Paul grasped the significance of God’s immeasurable love. He wrote, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It was because of God’s love, mercy, and grace that Paul consecrated his life to the Lord. In Galatians 2:20, he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

In Paul's inspired letter to the saints in Corinth, he stressed the Lord's love for us and the importance of consecrating our lives to Him in these powerful words, "For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and that He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). According to the apostle Paul, our understanding and appreciation of the sacrificial love of the Lord breeds commitment to the One who died and rose again. Once we grasp this profound truth, everything we do in His name becomes a "labor of love" (1 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 6:10).

PUPILS OF THE LORD

A disciple is said to be a learner. Our goal as disciples of Jesus is to learn more about Him through studying His word. Imagine having the opportunity to spend a little over three years with the Lord Jesus observing His actions on a daily basis. Do you suppose the time spent with Jesus would radically alter your life? The men Jesus selected to be His apostles were blessed with the opportunity to hear Jesus teach and preach over and over again. Furthermore, they witnessed His great power over disease, matter, nature, demons, and death. No wonder Peter said to Jesus, "we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69). Though we do not have the luxury of being in the physical presence of Jesus like Peter and the other apostles, we can spend time with Him nonetheless by carefully studying His word on a daily basis. As we sift through the biographical sketches of the life and work of Jesus, we can come to the same conclusion of Peter, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

One of the greatest needs in the church today is to rekindle an attitude of hunger and thirst for the word of God. The strength or weakness of our faith is directly tied to our study of God's inspired word. No wonder Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We should be like the Psalmist of old who recognized the importance of regularly feeding on the word of God. The record states, "his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

Sadly, the church has been weakened in many quarters because we, like ancient Israel, are devoid of Biblical knowledge (Hosea 4:6). We must raise the level of our Biblical competency in the fundamentals of the faith, or as Brother Rex Turner, Sr., used to call them, "the cardinal doctrines of the New Testament." The Hebrew Christians were admonished by the inspired writer for their deficiency in the ABC's of the Christian religion. He wrote, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). How tragic that many people today have been members of the church for years but are still babes in Christ. There is no way we can advance or defend the cause of Christ without knowing the Book. The apostle Peter wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). According to Peter, we must know what we believe and why we believe it. Therefore, let us resolve to dig deeply into the matchless treasure of divine truth and study fervently and faithfully. May we reignite our love for the truth and echo the

sentiments of the Psalmist when he penned, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

PRAISE THE LORD

Another attitude necessary in the church is the desire to commune with God through regular worship and devotion. Centuries ago, the Psalmist exhorted, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Psalm 95:6). Worship affords us the opportunity to bow in the presence of our Creator and give Him the homage He is rightfully due. The great prophet Isaiah said on one occasion that He “saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). The late Batsell Barrett Baxter said on one occasion that when we enter into worship, we ought to see the Lord “high and lifted up.” He was right. After all, we are in the presence of the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of heaven and earth. In Revelation 4, John provides us with a glimpse into the throne room of God, and he wrote, “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

The importance of worship was stressed by Jesus when He said to the woman at the well, “God (aim of worship) is Spirit, and those who worship Him must (absolute of worship) worship in spirit (attitude in worship) and truth (authority in worship)” (John 4:24; emphasis mine). It might very well be the case that in this day and time, we have forgotten the aim or object of worship is God. How many people go to worship to “get” rather than “give?” People who claim not to have gotten anything out of worship should reflect on what they put into the worship service. While we are the beneficiaries of countless blessings in worship, ultimately, it is about honoring God.

The absolute of worship is reflected in the fact that what the Lord said is not merely a suggestion, but a divine mandate. Nowhere has the Lord ever given man the latitude to dictate the terms of worship. Cain's disobedient spirit in the realm of worship is a timeless reminder to every generation that worship pleasing to God is regulated by faith (Jude 11; Hebrews 11:4; Romans 10:17). Every act of worship is governed by God's word. Jesus said He has all authority (Matthew 28:18), and God the Father said we are to "hear Him" (Matthew 17:5). Another passage of Scripture that stresses the authority of God's word is Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." It is unfortunate that many people in the church today no longer feel constrained to honor the authority of Christ in worship.

Worshipping God "in spirit" involves the right attitude. All five acts of worship necessitate mental engagement. It is possible to be physically present in the worship service but not mentally engaged. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to be in tune with the acts of worship. For example, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). As we partake of the bread, our mind is to recall the sacrificial body given in our stead (Matthew 26:26; 1 Peter 2:21-25). The fruit of the vine is a reminder of the shed blood of Jesus on Calvary (Matthew 26:27-29; 1 Peter 1:8-21). Paul in writing to the church at Corinth underscored the mental exercise necessary in the Lord's Supper by stating, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). Now note the words

of caution employed by Paul, “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:29).

PRODUCTIVITY FOR THE LORD

We have been saved to serve in the kingdom of God. It is an honor and privilege to be a member of the church of Christ and serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every work we engage in and every ounce of energy exerted on behalf of the Lord is to His honor and glory. The Lord Jesus taught, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Wouldn’t it be great if every member of the church in the twenty-first century viewed the work of the kingdom like the first century saints in Thessalonica? For them, serving the Lord was a “labor of love” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). It is my conviction that if you love what you do it is not work. The saints in Thessalonica labored for the Lord and His cause because of love. That ought to be catalyst for everything we do in the name of Jesus. Why do we teach people the gospel (Romans 3:9-10, 23; Matthew 28:19-20)? Why do reach out to wayward members of the body of Christ (Luke 15:4-30; James 5:19-20)? Why do we visit the sick and afflicted (Matthew 25:36)? Why do we comfort the hurting and bereaved (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2)? Why do we render aid to widows and orphans (James 1:27)? Why do we feed the hungry (Matthew 25:35a)? Why do we provide shelter to the homeless (Matthew 25:35b)? The reason we engage in all of these wonderful works is because we love the Lord supremely (Matthew 22:37-38; 1 John 4:19). We have been blessed to be a blessing.

Our “work and labor of love” will not be forgotten

by the Lord (Hebrews 6:10). One day, known only to the Lord, every faithful servant will hear the welcoming words, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Yes, heaven will surely be worth it all.

CONCLUSION

Many years ago the inspired Psalmist asked, “Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You” (Psalm 85:6)? In our modern age we need to revive our attitude and focus to capture the world for Christ. Let us strive to develop and demonstrate a spirit that reflects the heart of New Testament Christianity to a lost and dying world. And may God be glorified “in the church throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

Chapter 7

The Actions Needed In The Church

B.J. Clarke



In every age of Bible history, God has expected His people to be active in service to Him. In the Patriarchal Age, God gave Adam and Eve a work to do (Genesis 2:15-17). In the Mosaic Age, Israelites were commanded to labor (Exodus 20:9). God expected His people to work together in the building and upkeep of the tabernacle (Exodus 36:1-4; Numbers 4). There was work to do in the building and upkeep of the Old Testament temple (1 Kings 5-7; 2 Chronicles 24:13; Haggai 1:14; 2:4).

It should come as no surprise, then, that God expects His called-out people (the church) to be people of action. The Christians at Corinth were commanded to always abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). God gave spiritual gifts to the first century church to equip her for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Paul remembered the Thessalonian brethren for their work of faith, and labor of love (1 Thessalonians 1:3). But what specific actions has God assigned to the church?

TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST (EVANGELISM)

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10); we are to imitate Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6). Jesus gave His church the work of preaching the gospel to every creature in all nations (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20). When we read the book of Acts, we see the early church fervently engaged in the work of preaching the gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:8; 5:28; 8:4; 11:19-20; 13:1-3). It is the whole duty of the whole church to get the whole gospel to the whole world (1 Thessalonians 1:8) because untold billions are dying untold! The church is God's only missionary organization needed to evangelize the world with the gospel. It is our responsibility to plant the seed of the kingdom into the hearts of men, and to water it (Luke 8:11ff; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). God will give the increase. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). How shall the world be saved unless the gospel is preached unto them (Romans 10:14-18)?

In the days immediately following Pentecost, the church continued to grow on a daily basis (Acts 2:47). This was not a "flash-in-the-pan" kind of growth. In the weeks, months, and years which followed, the church continued to multiply and grow on a daily basis. The following passages attest to the phenomenal numerical growth of the early church:

Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand (Acts 4:4).

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women (Acts 5:14)

And in those days, when the **number of the disciples was multiplied**, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration (Acts 6:1).

And the word of God increased; and **the number of the disciples multiplied** in Jerusalem **greatly**; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, **were multiplied** (Acts 9:31).

And **all** that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and **turned to the Lord** (Acts 9:35).

And it was known throughout all Joppa; and **many believed in the Lord** (Acts 9:42).

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and **a great number believed**,

and turned unto the Lord (Acts 11:19-21).

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and **much people was added unto the Lord** (Acts 11:24).

But the word of God **grew and multiplied** (Acts 12:24).

And so were the churches established in the faith, and **increased in number daily** (Acts 16:5).

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:20).

The astonishing growth of the church, as reflected in the above texts, is exactly what Jesus predicted would happen. He described the kingdom of heaven as follows:

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it (Mark 4:31-32).

The rapid growth of the early church raises important questions: (1) What produced the life-giving growth of the first century church? (2) Is it possible for the church of today to experience the same type of life-giving growth? The answer to the second question hinges on how we answer

the first question. Fortunately, the secret to what caused the growth of the early church is not a secret. It is revealed clearly upon the pages of God's Word. It involves action!

The growth of the early church occurred because the right ingredients were present to produce it. The church of today can experience this same type of life-giving growth if it possesses the right attitudes toward the work of the church. For life-giving growth to occur the church must have...

PURPOSEFUL ACTION

Business seminars often emphasize the following core principle: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." In other words, a business must never forget its purpose for existence. Likewise, as the Lord's church, we must know what our Father's business is, and never be diverted from accomplishing His objectives. The Father has given the church a purpose for existence and we must make carry out His purpose.

The purpose of the Lord's church is "to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). The purpose of the church is "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of sins...to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:77,79). Our mission is point the lost to "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Since all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and the wages of sin is the second death (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:14-15), it is the object of the church to assist sinners in passing "from death unto life" (John 5:24). The church's task is to prepare lost souls for "the resurrection of life" rather than "the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29).

In short, the purpose of the church toward sinners is "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto

God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Acts 26:18).

POWERFUL ACTIONS

The early church clearly understood that the power to save is in the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). Accordingly, the practice of the infant church was to sow the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, into the hearts of men and women (Luke 8:4-15). Because they believed in the power of the gospel, the early church set out to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I [Jesus] have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Go back and read the passages in Acts which describe the numerical growth of the church and you will find a cause-effect relationship between gospel preaching and church growth. No wonder Paul wrote that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). No wonder he wrote that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). No wonder Paul affirmed that faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Life-giving growth is produced when the life-giving Word is preached.

PRIORITIZED ACTIONS

It is not enough to know our purpose and to know the power by which we may accomplish it. We must make fulfilling the Lord’s purpose our priority. As noted above, the early church made the preaching of the gospel its top priority. They did this publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). Unfortunately, many churches of today have misplaced their priorities. They have replaced the Lord’s

priority of preaching the saving gospel of Christ, with the “social gospel,” i.e., the task of meeting man’s physical needs. Although it is true that God expects for the local church to “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10), benevolence, properly used, is a means to an end and not an end within itself.

The “social gospel” mistakenly exalts the work of benevolence as the primary work of the church. However, the primary work of Jesus was not to eliminate poverty (Mark 14:7). The chief work of Jesus was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15). His compassionate acts of benevolence were designed to create receptive hearts to the gospel. What we have heard so often is true—people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care! Having said that, what good is it to satisfy someone’s physical hunger and thirst if we fail to give them the “meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (John 6:27) and “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14)?

Still others have forgotten the purpose and priority of the church by turning the church into one big social club. It is not the work of the local church to provide entertainment, recreation and social activities for the community. God never intended for the church to be a glorified “YMCA.” However, our society has become enamored with the so-called “super-churches,” also known as “mega churches.” The Second Baptist Church of Houston, has a health club and movie theater. The Willow Creek Community Church, of South Barrington, Illinois, boasts that they draw 15,000 worshippers every weekend. They attract these worshippers by eliminating any Bible preaching. Instead, they offer a pop singer, a 10-piece rock band, and actors who present a skit in which they illustrate contemporary problems such as stress and grief. Willow Creek meets in a \$37 million facility, and \$85,000

a year is budgeted for traffic control. The denomination has a \$10.3 million operations budget. This money is spent on 91 different ministries, including aerobics classes, a seminar on menopause, and payment for 3 basketball courts.

Tragically, some of our brethren have forsaken the purpose of the church and have started imitating these denominational “mega churches.” Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr. wrote an article addressing this very mindset:

We live in an age where people prefer fun over faith, the lake over the Lord, things over the truth, sports over the Saviour, gadgets over God, gimmicks over the gospel, laughter over the Lord, recreation over redemption and entertainment over edification.

Likewise, some of our brethren have apparently forgotten where the power to produce life-giving growth may be found. They have not placed a premium upon preaching the Word because they have lost faith in its power. Consequently, they have replaced gospel preaching with drama. They have reshaped the singing to be performance oriented, appointing certain ones to sing in the choir, or to sing a solo. The singing of songs is followed by applause from the congregation. They have used the Lord’s money to build recreational facilities. They have hired youth ministers and given them the task of being glorified “recreational directors” to the exclusion of shaping our young people’s spiritual lives.

In the Gospel Advocate, May 20, 1948, B. C. Goodpasture wrote:

Amusement and recreation should stem

from the home rather than the church! The church, like Nehemiah, has a great work to do and it should not come down to the plains of Ono to amuse and entertain. As the church turns its attention to amusement and recreation, it will be shorn of its power just as Samson was when his hair was cut.

If we rely on gimmicks to get people into the building, we will have to rely on gimmicks to keep them there! Furthermore, we will have to compete with the gimmicks of other churches and, as brother Taylor observed, “if some other group serves a better hamburger, a better breakfast, has a finer gymnasium or more expensive door prizes and more cash under the lucky seat, they will congregate there with a rapidity that is amazing indeed!”

PEOPLE OF ACTION

Having clearly defined the purpose of the church, it is imperative that we identify the people expected to prioritize the fulfillment of this purpose. The original recipients of the “great commission” were the apostles to whom Jesus spoke shortly before His ascension (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). However, it is clear that Jesus did not limit the charge to evangelize the world to the apostles because He told them to teach the ones they baptized to observe all things that He had commanded them (the apostles) to do. According to Acts 2, the ones who were baptized by the apostles were the very same ones who were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Hence, the apostles were to instruct the church to observe all things that Jesus had commanded them (the apostles) to do. One of the things Jesus told the apostles to do was to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Therefore, in order for the church

to observe all things that Jesus commanded the apostles to do, the church must observe the command to evangelize the world.

In fact, a study of the book of Acts reveals that the church was (and is) God's one and only missionary organization. The messengers charged to carry out the mission of evangelism are the individual members of the church of Jesus Christ. The gathered church in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7) became the scattered church as the individual members of the church were, as a result of persecution, "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4).

It is interesting to observe that it was not the apostles who were responsible for the evangelism of the regions of Judea and Samaria, nor was it exclusively a group of "full-time preachers." Rather, the individual members of the church that started in Jerusalem carried out this evangelistic effort. Likewise, the Lord's church today needs to get away from the idea that evangelism is something we hire the preacher to do. Paul told Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

There has often been the tendency among God's people for some to sit back and watch while others go out to battle. For example, as the children of Israel approached the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben and Gad decided that they would prefer to raise their cattle right where they were rather than on the other side of the Jordan. However, when they made this proposal to Moses and the other rulers of Israel, Moses asked, "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" (Numbers 32:6). Ultimately, the children of Reuben and Gad fought alongside of their brethren and, only after

the battle was fought and finished, did they go back across the Jordan to claim the fertile pastureland for their cattle.

When the Israelites joined hands to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they accomplished their task in record time because of their mutual cooperation in the project (Nehemiah 3; 4:21-23). Likewise, regarding spiritual Zion, the Lord's church, the Son of Man has left "to every man his work" (Mark 13:34). Just as all four men were needed to carry a corner of the bed of the paralytic they were transporting (Mark 2), each member needs to carry their corner in supporting local efforts at evangelism.

The emphasis upon the individual responsibility of each member of the church to be a messenger of the good news is captured in Paul's teaching about church growth. Simply put, the church will grow when every part of the body does its share (Ephesians 4:16). Each and every member of the Lord's church should be a messenger of the good news. A pile of iron links are useless by themselves—but put them together to make a chain and they can hold a ship to its anchor in the midst of the greatest storm!

When preachers speak the truth in love, (Ephesians 4:15) and reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long suffering, (2 Timothy 4:2) the church will grow. When elders shepherd the flock properly under the direction of the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4), the church will grow. When deacons serve well, it will be well with them and the growth of the church (1 Timothy 3:13; Acts 6:1-7). When each member seeks to live like Christ, love like Christ, and tell the world about Christ, then the church will experience life-giving growth. This is God's plan and it will not fail!

Someone has written,

A church that does not extend to meet opportunities and possibilities is on its way to the cemetery. The members who do nothing are its pallbearers. All who are busy with their own affairs and have no time for the church carry the wreath. The indifferent brother is driving the hearse. Those always holding the church back are throwing flowers on the grave. The brother who is always saying, 'It can't be done' is preaching the funeral, and the grumblers are singing the hymns. Thus the church dies from all cares.

PASSIONATE ACTION

Why is there such a vast difference between the growth of the early church and that of the Lord's church today? It all boils down to one word—passion. The first century disciples were so passionate about their faith that they were willing to suffer physical persecution, and even death, for Him (Acts 5:28-42; 7: 54-60; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 2:10). Years ago, I heard someone say, "The problem with Christians today is that nobody wants to kill them anymore!" The more I think about that statement, the more accurate I think it is!

Moreover, as we read of the tremendous sacrifices endured by the Apostle Paul so that the cause of Christ might be advanced (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), how can we not be motivated to passionately serve the Lord? It is sad that in our day and time many will not suffer verbal persecution, much less physical persecution, for the cause of Christ. Many refuse to sacrifice an evening of television,

much less their very lives, in order to advance the cause of Christ! If the church of today is ever going to exhibit life-giving growth we must replace our apathy with passion.

You don't have to travel hundreds of miles to a soul-winning workshop to unlock the secret of life-giving growth. You don't have to travel to the bookstore to purchase the latest volume written to reveal the mystery of church growth. Just travel over to the bookcase, pull down your copy of the sacred writings, open it to the New Testament and start reading and imitating what you see.

When we sow the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, (Luke 8:11) bountifully, we shall reap a bountiful harvest. Conversely, when we sow the Word sparingly, we shall reap sparingly. The first century church spread the Word far and wide (1 Thessalonians 1:8), and that is why the church grew abundantly. Similarly, when the church of Christ grew so much from 1945-1965 it was because the members possessed an abundance of Bible knowledge and a commitment to sow it abundantly into the hearts of men. If we want the Lord's church to grow today, we must be more active in broadcasting the seed of the kingdom!

TO KEEP THE SAVED, SAVED (EDIFICATION)

Our work is not done when we teach and baptize. More action is needed. The latter portion of the great commission (Matthew 28:20) has as its emphasis the edification of the saved. It is not enough to baptize the lost into Christ; we must teach the saved to observe all things that Christ has commanded. Shortly after the conversion of Saul, the churches throughout all Judea, Samaria and Galilee were "edified" (Acts 9:31). The missionary journeys of Paul demonstrate the importance of edification. Near the end of their first

missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas made a special point to confirm the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22). At the beginning of the second missionary journey, Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming (strengthening) the churches (Acts 15:41). It is not enough for the local church to be established; it must also be established in the faith (Acts 16:5).

God gave miraculous gifts to the early church “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:8-12). Although we do not have miraculous gifts available unto us today, we are not without sources of edification. We are edified and built up by the Word of God (Acts 20:32; Colossians 1:9-11; 3:16; 1 Timothy 4:13). That is why our Bible classes and sermons should be saturated with God’s Word! We are edified by teaching and encouraging one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 3:12-13). We are edified by true worship (1 Corinthians 14:26).

CONCLUSION

Evangelism and edification are the heart and soul of the church’s mission! How well are we doing in making these areas our priority? Let us work, let us pray, let us labor every day in the vineyard of the Lord! Let us be people of action!

Chapter 8

The Parent's Checklist

Robert Taylor, Jr.



It continues to be a spring delight to come to East Hill in May to participate in an exceedingly fine lectureship. My thanks are extended to Jonathan, the East Hill elders and each precious member of a sound and solid congregation for the current invitation to speak on the 2019 one.

The focus of my assignment is checking the list of parents – wrong parentage as well as right parentage. Mention the lovely word HOME and we think of husband, wife, fathers, mothers and children.

Marriage began for Adam and Eve the very day of their creation. It would never be that way for any of their descendants. Since Genesis 2 it has been God's order for there to be marriage, intimacy, and then children (1 Timothy 5:14). With the arrival of children husbands and wives become fathers and mothers. What an awesome responsibility this is.

This lecture will cover parentage negatively and positively. Parentage not needed will form the negative; parentage needed will be of the positive.

PARENTS NOT NEEDED: THE NEGATIVES

We do not need parentage like Cain. Moses wrote of him in the early chapters of Genesis and John depicts more about him in 1 John 3:14. He was wicked while Abel, his brother, was righteous (Hebrews. 11:4). John said Cain was of the wicked one-Satan. He was extremely callous and cruel. We know he was married and had offspring. Cain knew his wife (sexual activity) and not just his initial acquaintance with her. "Where did Cain get his wife?" is an oft-asked question. Obviously, it had to be one of his younger sisters. Brother Gus Nichols stayed with a family while in a meeting. Every day the farmer would ask, "Brother Nichols, where did Cain get his wife?" Brother Nichols, a walking Bible, knew as much about it as anyone. Finally, one day Brother Nichols said, "Brother, if you pay as much attention to your wife, as Cain's wife, she would be better off and so would I." Cain began a line of wicked descendants who helped populate a world. The daughters of men portrayed in Genesis 6:1-2 who married the sons of God may well have been of Cain's line of descendants. This is the very background leading up and into the universal flood in Noah's era.

We do not need fathers today who pattern themselves after Lot. When facing a momentous decision, he chose a good place to raise livestock but a very poor environment for the rearing of children. He pitched his tent toward Sodom and soon lived in this very corrupt city. Lot's tragedy is spelled out in Genesis 19. In vacating burning Sodom, his wife turned back to look at burning Sodom and was turned into a pillar of salt. His two daughters got their father drunk and each had a son by Lot-Moab and Ben-ammi or Ammon. Sodom was their downfall. It matters where our tent is pitched.

We do now need parents like permissive Eli was to his two sons: Hophni and Phinehas. They were notorious in evil and highly irreligious. About all Eli did was to rebuke them. Yet, Eli held a trio of powers. 1) He was their parent and thus had parental power. 2) He was the high priest and thus had religious power. 3) He was a judge and thus held civil power. None of these were employed by Eli. Both his sons came to a tragic end (1 Samuel 4:11).

We do not need parents today who emulate Jeroboam, first king of Israel of the Northern Kingdom. He did not walk after the commandments of Jehovah. Thus he set a pattern unworthy to follow by the son that succeeded him or any of his descendants. Each of his successors was a failure. Again and again it is said of Israelite rulers that they walked in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

We do not need parents today like Ahab and Jezebel were to Athaliah in the book of 1 Kings. We do not need parents today like Athaliah who, in her grasp for power, murdered her grandchildren except one. She counseled her own son to do evil as we learn in 2 Chronicles 22:3.

We do not need parents today like the Herodian family in the New Testament. Herod the Great killed two of his own sons and also his favorite wife-Marianne. We do not need mothers like Herodias was to Salome who instigated the murder of John the Baptist (Matthew 14). We do not need fathers today like Herod Agrippa was to his children - Agrippa, Drusilla and Bernice. This Agrippa was the one to whom Paul preached in Acts 26 who told Paul about being almost persuaded to become a Christian (Acts 26:28).

We do not need parents who teach their children to curse, be dishonest, steal, murder or engage in immorality. A young man once told me his father told him as he

began to date to go as far as each girl would allow. He followed this poor counsel only to regret it deeply later on.

We do not need parents today who discourage their children from obeying the gospel. I have baptized young people who had to disobey fathers to obey God. I recall three times this had happened to me. In one instance four people were involved-wife and three children. She had to go against her husband and the three children had to go against their own father. In another of these instances the father literally stopped his high school son right before he and I went to dress for the baptism. Later, I took him to another city and baptized him. What courage these people had!

GODLY PARENTAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE PRECIOUS POSITIVE

We need fathers today like Seth, second from Adam and Eve. He fathered a family line opposed to the family begun by Cain. The sons of God pictured in Genesis 6:1-2 may well have been descendants from Seth. Seth was in the line from whom Jesus came as per Luke 3:38. He made the name Seth into an honorable one. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David also came through this line.

We need fathers today like the excellent Enoch. We learn more about him from Genesis 5, Hebrews 11:5, and Jude 14-15. He walked with God for three hundred or more years. Methuselah and his younger siblings never had a day but they had a marvelous man as their model. This cannot be said of most children today; they do not have a father, or mother, who walks with God!

We need fathers today like Noah was to his family. He loved God and his family in that precise order. At Jehovah's bidding he build an ark for his own physical salvation

but also for his family's salvation. What a monumental Noah was in his day. He is listed in Inspiration's Hall of Faith and Fame in Hebrews 11:5. Peter alludes to this in 1 Peter 3:20 as a great example to us. Let us heed it wisely.

We need fathers today like Abraham, the friend of God, was to his family. In thrilling sentiments Moses wrote in Genesis 18:19, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken to him." What a great tribute paid to him but also to his pliable family. A careful look at Isaac and Jacob testify of this confidence Jehovah had in His friend. Isaac lived as a contemporary with Abraham 75 years; Jacob lived as contemporary with Abraham 15 years. Throughout the Bible his descendants often called him "father" Abraham. God strongly preferred to be known as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. What a noble tribute this is to these Hebrew greats!

We need fathers and mothers as Jacob and Rachel were to Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph's mother with undying love. She was the love of his life. Later Rachel will die in giving birth to Benjamin. Later Benjamin will learn of his mother's sacrifice that he might live. What a legacy and heritage he received from his mother.

We need mothers today like Ruth was to Obed and Hannah was to Samuel. These are two of the most admired women in the Old Testament. They were great both in character and reputation. Both of them were married to great men, Boaz and Elkanah respectively.

We need mothers today like Jochebed was to Moses. She had two other children- Aaron and Miriam, important Israelites in their own right. She not only gave birth to Moses

but nurtured and taught him in the short time he was with her before becoming the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Her continuing influence over Moses is seen in the life-changing decision he made at age 40. By any measurement he is one of the greatest men of all time. There have been no greater men in all history than Jesus Christ, Moses, John the Baptist, and Paul. Before there was a Moses there was a faithful Jochebed. What fruitful lessons can be gleaned from the Old Testament! I am reminded of Paul's great verse in Romans 15:4 which reads, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." This is true of both precepts and personalities in the Old Testament.

GODLY PARENTAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: PRECIOUS POSITIVES

Since the Scriptures furnish us with all we need, we would expect to find therein great examples for our emulation. We shall not be disappointed in the example category (Hebrews 11).

We need fathers and mothers like Zacharias and Elisabeth provided for John the Baptist. Luke is the only writer in the New Testament making mention of John's parentage and John's early life. This he does in Luke 1, the longest chapter in the New Testament. Luke wrote a thrilling biography about this couple in some 18 words in our English Bible. They read, "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinance of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:4). Both were of noble character and a deserved reputation. They both were desirous of having a child which was fulfilled in late life. They had prayed for such a heavenly blessing might be conferred upon them (Luke 1:13). They were devoutly pious and very religious in living

truth. He was a faithful priest and she was a true Israelite. They counted Mary, Jesus' mother, as a dear friend which is manifested in this long chapter. Both of these spoke highly and reverently about the coming Redeemer. We do not know how long they lived after John's birth. We can be assured that they lost NO time in training their new son. John's mind was pliable and they took full advantage of this ideal teaching situation. Jesus said of His Messianic Harbinger. "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:11). John died before the kingdom in perfection became a rich reality in Acts 2. This shows just how precious kingdom membership is under the new covenant. Yet John preached of its establishment in Matthew 3:2. He knew for a certainty that it would be established in due time. And it was!

We need parents today like Joseph was to the household he headed. He played NO part in Jesus' conception and birth. The Christ was virgin-conceived and virgin-born as we learn from Luke 1, Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18-25. The younger siblings of Jesus had excellent parentage in Joseph and Mary. No mother ever loved a son more than Mary did with Jesus. Joseph's exemplary life unfolds for us in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2:40-52. No parent ever had a child to rear like Mary and Joseph did. He was in a class all by Himself. (Luke 2:52).

We need parents today like those wonderful women who loved Jesus so faithfully and loyally. While Jesus was here, multitudes of men hated, rejected and crucified Him. Be it said to their credit that women loved, respected and served Him in fine fashion. The very first appearance Jesus made after His resurrection was to a woman-Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). The second appearance was to a group of women (Matthew

28:9). Even Pilate's pagan wife spoke reverently of the tried Christ before her husband (Matt. 27:19). Women were last at Calvary and first at the tomb. Today, many congregations have more women members than male members. One of the greatest pillars upholding Christianity is Christian women.

We do not know how many of these worthy women were married and had children but those that did wanted their mates and children to be what they were—faithful followers of the Christ.

We need today's mothers and grandmothers like Timothy had in his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. (2 Timothy 1:5). These two possessed an unfeigned faith and Timothy did also. Timothy came from a rich, spiritual background. It is of no wonder that Paul wrote so eloquently of him in Philippians 2:19-22. Here are three generations possessing power-packed faith.

We need mothers today like the elect lady portrayed in 2 John. She had children and reared them in a faithful fashion. No wonder John loved this family so dearly and deeply.

MODERN MOTHERS: PRECIOUS POSITIVES

We need mothers today like the late, and lamented T. B. Larimore had in his highly esteemed mother. He has been called "the grand, old man of the brotherhood." He was one of the most eloquent preachers of the 19th and 20th centuries. He always spoke of her with the highest love a son can have in a mother.

We need mothers today like the Kentucky lady who brought into the world Ira, Boone and Cecil Douthett. I never met or heard Cecil preach, but I did Ira and Boone. I counted Boone a dear friend and was once a guest at his Nashville home in the early 1950's. He and I preached for some of the same congregations. What a precious memory he is to me. If I recall correctly, she was the lone convert

in a Kentucky meeting. One member of that congregation appraised this meeting as being without much success. If only he could have lived long enough to hear all the good this trio accomplished. A similar story occurred in Mississippi. From one girl came some of the finest preachers of recent centuries.

We need mothers today like a mother who was a member of the Charlotte Avenue congregation. This happened more than 65 years ago. This young man was far from his Nashville mother and home serving in the military. On a Wednesday morning some of his fellow soldiers told him they had received permission to go into a near-by city filling the evening with strong drink and seeking out willing women for immoral purposes. They invited him to obtain leave and accompany. In a moment of weakness he agreed to go with them. Later that day a thought hit him like a thunderbolt. He said to himself that tonight is Mid-week Bible Study. He knew his dear mother would be right there and when they had their public prayer she, silently, would pray for her son in service. A night of drinking and immorality had no affinity with a prayerful mother in Tennessee. He told the fellow soldiers he would NOT be going after all. In the early 1950's a teacher of mine at David Lipscomb College told us in class of this. He was the preacher at Charlotte Avenue and knew the situation accurately. As I heard him, I thought about 1 Corinthians 10:13 wherein we read: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted about that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." This could well have been the lever the young man needed to avoid a night of sinful activity. Many men and women in service would not have had this lever

because their parents are far from being faithful at all church service, including Mid-week Bible Study.

Fathers and mothers who have sons or daughters in service, are you reading carefully and profitably?

CONCLUSION

How well does our check list compare with the godly men and women portrayed in this chapter and lecture? If the comparison is weak, then we have our work cut out for us! We owe our children worthy examples and true teaching.

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Chapter 9

When We Miss The Mark

Jeremy Butt



On Sunday evening, January 6, several of our youth group were at Spring Meadows for their area wide youth night. Upon exiting the building after supper, one of our young men had evidently seen the recap of the ending of the Bears and Eagles football game. Foster Isenberg is a huge Bears fan, and he begrudgingly told me that their kicker attempted a game-winning field goal in the closing moments of the game, but it hit the left upright and the crossbar and bounced out. In order for that field goal to be good, the ball would have had to go through the uprights. What happened? The kicker missed the mark.

One time I was archery hunting for deer when I was a teenager, and I attempted a shot on a doe in the woods. The deer was partly exposed, due to a tree being in the way. I thought I had enough of a window for a good shot. I let my arrow fly, only to hear a thud while I watched the deer run away. I glanced back to where the deer was standing when I released the arrow, and there it was stuck in the tree. I was about two inches from success, but the arrow in the tree reminded me that I had missed the mark.

People can miss the mark on lots of things in this world even from an everyday perspective. When you're driving and you're exceeding the speed limit, you have missed the mark. When you're in school and you take a test where you get a bad grade, you've missed the mark. When your boss gives you a deadline for a project at work but it ends up being late, you missed the mark. It's easy to see how we can miss the mark in life.

What is the mark? The mark is the standard, the expectation, the goal we are striving for. Just like a bullseye on an archery target, you have a mark you are trying to hit. In the literary work *The School of Shooting*, there is a conversation taking place between Philologus and Toxophilus. Philologus asks "What is the chief point in shooting, that every man laboureth to come to?" Toxophilus replies "to hit the mark." (Ascham).

As important as it is to hit the mark in things in life, we understand there is a much greater spiritual implication at stake. The word translated as sin in our Bibles in noun form is hamartia, which literally means to miss the mark (Vine 1045). In God's communication to man, His Word, we understand our objectives that God has set forth. When we don't meet those objectives, we sin or miss the mark. We see it all the way from Genesis to Revelation, and the missing of the mark continues even today. The Apostle Paul said "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

This year's Truth In Love Lectureship is focused on the family of God, and the Saturday session centers around the physical family, the home. Sometimes the physical family can take a back seat to the spiritual family, the church, but we need to remember the home as God designed it is not meant to be second rate. The home is the training ground for what your children will grow up to be in the Lord's church. There is teaching,

molding, and training which occurs in a God-fearing family.

However, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. With that in mind, let us consider the fact that parents miss the mark in the home. What are some ways this can happen?

PARENTS CAN MISS THE MARK OF EDUCATION

Consider some passages from the Old Testament. Between the plagues of the hail and the locusts, God told Moses that he should tell his son and grandson what things He wrought in Egypt (Exodus 10:2). Later when Moses was recounting the Law that God had established with His people, he said:

Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

One can see from these passages that God wanted the children to know these things. It is up to the parents, or whoever else might be raising the children, to instill these things to them. We understand that sometimes we don't do this the way we should. We should remember that just as congregations of the Lord's church are autonomous, each household is going to be responsible for educating their children in the ways of God.

Sometimes when we miss the mark in educating our children it's what we don't do, and at other times it's

what we can do better. Do we as fathers ever see to it that we have devotionals with our families? Do we read the Scriptures with them? Do we stress the importance of prayer and pray with them? Especially with fathers being the spiritual head of the family, we've got to make sure we are teaching our children in the home.

PARENTS CAN MISS THE MARK OF CORRECTION

I remember being in a discussion one time at an assisted living home after I taught a Bible class. Several of us were sitting around a table eating lunch when the subject of disciplining children came up. One of the older ladies told me that she never hit her kids and people who did were just white trash. Now, I could have sat there and not said anything, but I knew all the other ladies at the table were watching to see what I was going to say. I spoke up in response by pointing out to this lady, bless her heart, that the Word of God has quite a bit to say about the discipline of children, especially pertaining to physically corrective measures.

I brought up the statement in Proverbs that says "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (13:24). Some old English verbage doesn't necessarily resonate with us today, but that word they translated as betimes means diligently. Some have thought in the past the idea is promptly, but while there might be needed ingredient of promptness with punishment, the greater idea is doing it thoroughly and thoughtfully.

I also brought up what the writer said a bit later: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell"

(Proverbs 23:13-14). The rod is clearly referring to physical punishment or corporal punishment as we refer to it at times, not a form of discipline such as a time out. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with a time out, but there's also a place for physical discipline. The Bible clearly speaks of that when it shows you how important discipline is.

When parents don't correct their children they enable them to set their own path for the person they want to be. Many problems with young people today occur because parents aren't correcting their children when they are in need of correction. There was a saying I used to hear when I was growing up: "You live under my roof, you live under my rules." It was insinuated with that statement that if we got out of line, there would be corrective measures to ensure we knew that our behavior was unacceptable and to instruct us in the right way. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that while it might be painful at the moment, there is a much greater aim of discipline: "...afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (12:11)

Any parent knows that there are rules, and rules are supposed to be followed. However, as a parent there are going to be some changes as the kids get older, and there might be some new rules. Sometimes rules might develop in the aftermath of a situation because of what happened. A story is told of a mother picking up her son after the first day of daycare when she noticed that he had marker all over his body. When she asked if they did not have a rule about not coloring all over yourself, he said "they do now" (Chidekel, 185). When parents become aware of a situation that needs to be addressed, they need to address it. Even if it's after the fact, it will benefit the child in the long run.

PARENTS CAN MISS THE MARK OF PARTICIPATION

One of the traits of God is that He is omnipresent. He can be as many places at one time as He needs to be. We as human beings are not like that. We can only be one place at a time. Sometimes parents are working while their children might be competing on a sports team or playing at a recital or acting in a play. While many parents will try to make as many events of their kids as they can, the fact remains they might not be able to make all of them. The parents will feel sad or heartbroken that they can't be there. Bill McDonald told the story one time about how he had to leave one of his daughter's birthday parties. He was apologizing to her for having to leave and she replied "I'm used to it."

On the other hand there are parents who are not there for their children at all. They are not participating in their lives. They don't know what's going on at school, they don't know what position their child plays on the team and they might not even engage their children in much conversation. Children need the participation of their parents in their lives. Go back and look at a similar passage in Deuteronomy 11 where we see some of the same things we saw in Deuteronomy 6. Moses, in talking of the instruction the fathers would give their children, said "...speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 11:19). One of the things evident from this text aside from the instruction and teaching is the presence of the parents. There is much to be said for parents who are there when their kids are at home, traveling, going to sleep and waking in the morning.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau from a census taken in 2017, the following statistics show the findings of

those who grow up without a father in the home: there are 19.7 million children without a father in the home (1 in 4 children); 4 times a greater risk of poverty; 7 times more likely for a teenage pregnancy; more likely to go to prison; more likely to have behavioral problems (National). This list goes on to cover more things, but this should suffice. It's important for both parents to be involved in the lives of their children.

Knowing how important it is for a child to have not just both parents in their life, but for them to be involved parents, how much greater should we view the responsibility which God has given to us to make sure we are bringing up our children in the "...nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Are we going to miss the mark? Absolutely we will miss the mark, because we are human beings. However, we need to do all we can to make sure we are focused on the mark and striving to achieve it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have coached bowling for the past four years, and I have lost count of the times I have asked them if they missed their mark when I notice a bad shot. Satan is the master accuser, and he loves it when he can bring things against us to show how we miss the mark. He was right there beside Joshua the high priest to accuse him when Joshua was clothed in filthy garments before the angel of the Lord (Zechariah 3). In the book of Job we see Satan presenting himself before the Lord saying he had been "...going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1:7; 2:2). We don't have to wonder what Satan was trying to do as God asked if Satan had considered his servant, Job. Satan believed he could get Job to sin by cursing God, thus missing the mark.

We need to be reassured that the accuser of our

brethren has been thrown down to the earth, as we read about the victory of the Lord which occurred at the cross of Calvary (Revelation 12:10-11). When we miss the mark, we have the assurance that the power of the accuser is not greater than the advocate who is at the right hand of God, "...Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). We miss the mark and we miss it often, but we should be grateful for what Jesus does for us. As long as the home still exists on this earth until the Lord returns, there will be parents missing the mark in the home. Let us be grateful for the opportunities which God has blessed us with, and let's try to make sure we are taking aim at the correct mark.

To borrow some terminology from the Apostle Paul as he spoke of attaining to the resurrection from the dead, he said "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Let's all press toward the mark, for the other souls under our care in the home are important not only to us but also to the Lord.

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Chapter 10

The Father's Tools

Bill Irby



On April 23, 1982 my life changed forever. Our oldest son Will was born at the West Georgia Medical Center in LaGrange. Our doctor, a member where I was preaching then, had told us that he had an office full of patients and that Ginger needed to have the baby during his lunch hour. Ginger and Will cooperated. Three and a half years later our youngest son Tom was born. We have been blessed beyond our ability to measure by these two boys; boys who are now grown men, smart, strong and caring.

Though this has happened to me, I am not sure that these events fully equip me to talk about the tools a father has or should have to use in his role as the leader of his home. Like every father who lives by the Biblical pattern, I have tried my best. I knew, however, that I was not capable of discovering the best tool set for me to use as a father. I know now as I knew then that I had to rely on God. Though I worked through the process imperfectly I did and do believe that the answers, the tool kit, are found in the principles revealed in God's Good Book.

So we begin with the first of those tools, the Bible itself. The Bible is, in a real sense, the owner's manual for

being a proper human, so of course it is the owner's manual for being a father. The Bible was breathed out by God and thus is authoritative in all its commands, examples and conclusions correctly understood (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The principles revealed in the Bible are right, absolutely true. Not only so, they are also perfectly helpful from the pragmatic perspective. God's direction is never just theoretical; if His instructions are applied with love and good sense, they always work.

So it makes all the sense in the world when we seek to load our tool box we look to God's Word not only first but also as our overall guide. The first and rather obvious thing we learn from the Bible and from observing God's created reality is that fathers are men. That is, they are male human beings. Very early in the Bible we read "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).

One may have every Craftsman or Snap-On tool in their catalogs, but unless we use them properly, they are very little good. It is essential that we come to fatherhood understanding that God made us male and female and as such we have different roles that are defined in large part by the fact that we come into this world a man or a woman. Which one we are is, according to the Bible, and until recently the common sense of people, determined at the moment we are born. I had no doubt that our sons were sons and not daughters. I had no doubt that my granddaughter was our granddaughter and not a grandson. This present day foolishness about gender determination is simply silly. Can people be led to be confused about what is proper sexual behavior? Certainly. But that does not and cannot change what we are.

So as we approach our toolbox it is important to understand that fathers are men. It seems ridiculous

to say this, but lest you think it is, just bring up the subject among young people on just about any college campus. You may find that saying that fathers are men will cause you to be labeled a dangerous extremist.

God equipped men with physical characteristics that enable us to be good fathers. God made us bigger and stronger so that we could meet our responsibility to provide for and protect our families. Women are very strong in many areas of life. But men have the tool of strength and God expects us to use that tool according to His will. A godly man's strength is tempered by love and care for those in his life who are weaker. Thus a good man will never use his strength to brutalize or harm his wife or children. To be mean spirited and abusive would eventually provoke "his children to wrath" and we are not to do that (Ephesians 6:4).

God also organized biological reality so that a man has to reach a certain physical age before he can be a father. This is evident by observation. Of greater importance are emotional and intellectual maturity. Becoming a father physically is not terribly difficult. Becoming a father in the way we think and react is by far the greater challenge. Somebody has to be the grown-up and it ought to be the leader of the family, the father.

Maturity in all its elements is an essential tool for fathers. But the most important and all-encompassing aspect of maturity is spiritual. People use this word in a number of ways, many of which are incorrect; many moderns think to be spiritual is to be guided by one's emotions. If we allow the Bible to provide our definition, "spiritual" describes the quality of living life as closely as possible to the principles revealed in the Text by the Holy Spirit. To be spiritual is to be a person who obeys God. The classic passage that helps us understand this is Galatians 5:16-26.

The father's tool of true spirituality helps him wrench from his life the works of the flesh, "which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies. envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like...." (Galatians 5:19-21). The father's tool of true spirituality helps him nail down the way he ought to live, being sure that he presents in all aspects of his life what Paul defines as the fruit of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23). This is what it really means to be a spiritual man.

We have thought thus far about the father's tools in terms of an overall spiritual orientation as defined by the contrast between the lusts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Now let us think about some other specific tools a father can and should have in his parental tool box. We might well consider the toolbox to be Bible knowledge. All of us are to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We know that "study" here means to be diligent and is close to the idea of being someone who concentrates on his task. We also know that destruction awaits those who lack knowledge (Hosea 4:6). For the people who heard Hosea, that destruction was physical and spiritual. A man who is blessed by being a father risks not just his life but the lives of those he is given to lead and protect if he does not direct his family to know and practice God's Word.

One of the saddest things I've seen in my years of being a local preacher is the father dropping his wife and children off at the door of the building for Bible class. He may return for worship or he may not; in many cases he just comes back to pick them up in time for lunch or so he can get to the

golf course or the lake. This sort of behavior is like having a garage full of the finest tools at your disposal and just leaving them there to rust. On occasions when the inconsistencies of such a practice are presented to a father who does this we may hear him say, “Well, I brought them, didn’t I?”

The sad truth is that children watch and remember actions very efficiently. It does no good to say “Don’t do as I do, do as I say to do.” My own father, a drinker and good man in many ways, was careful to instruct me about the problems that come with alcohol. I ignored his lessons and followed his example by using and abusing alcohol as often as I could until I learned better.

A father may well teach his boys that they should never hit a woman. But if that father hits a woman, the son is likely to follow his example. A father may well teach his boys that they should never hurt those weaker than them. But if they see their father harm the weak, they will likely ignore the teaching and embrace the example. This paradigm holds true whatever the behavior: The kids, especially the boys, will copy their dad much more readily than they will listen to him.

A man’s son will speak the language he hears his father speak. He may pretend to himself that his boy may do better. And with great and continued effort he may. But the boy can only start from one place and that place is without doubt where his father stands. If for no other reason (and there are many other reasons) the man blessed by being a father ought to learn, know and practice the principles revealed as God’s will in His Word. The priests in Hosea’s time facilitated the destruction of God’s people by their feckless leadership. The father who chooses to be ignorant of God’s truth enables the spiritual trauma in the lives of his children.

Paul directed Ephesians 6:4 to fathers: “And ye fathers,

provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” It is clear from this that God expects fathers to emulate Him as they parent their children. The first of the three elements to Ephesians 6:4 is a negative one: fathers are not supposed to provoke their children to wrath. The commentaries weigh in from varied points of view on this part of the verse usually arising from the cultural climate of the commentators peer group. But the meaning of the word translated “provoke to wrath” is not mysterious; indeed it is correctly translated. The meaning is plainly that the father is not to agitate his children into a state of anger. Some folks these days are so firmly opposed to any sort of punishment for children that we might hear them say that this verse outlaws punishment. Can this be?

Now if we consider the other two elements of the verse: fathers are to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There is the key: fathers must follow the Lord's example in bringing up their children. We all have read “For whom the Lord loveth He chaseth” (Hebrews 12:6). God loves us, His children, so He teaches us and corrects us, sometimes with great firmness. God chastens us when we fall because when we fall we learn that the element of creation we know as gravity is a very real thing. All the laws of physics are very real creations from the mind of God. If and when we neglect to obey those laws we pay a punishing price. Perhaps you remember the first time you lost control of a car?

A man learns what sin is by reading, and then knowing the truth of God's word. He often finds correction when the consequences of sin come to bear. As I mentioned, my own father, a man I loved and still miss, did not lead me with the proper example on the subject of alcohol. I had to learn the truth about alcohol the hard way. I did and I am thankful for

the opportunity granted me to do so. But, speaking of being better off, how much better off would any of us be if our fathers had, with sensitivity and intelligence, taught us about the dangers of this life. If your father did this for you, count yourself blessed because he included, in what he did for you, bringing you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

So fathers have available from the toolbox of Bible knowledge the tool of correction and chastisement. Fathers who know the Book do not just pay attention to the principles revealed in Ephesians 6:4. Another tool is revealed earlier in Ephesians as Paul speaks of the role of grace in salvation in Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” Ephesians 2:8-10 can help fathers obey Ephesians 6:4.

How is this so? Fathers can keep from provoking their children to wrath and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by remembering how God saves the souls of men. If the father is a Christian, he will know how God saved his soul, and he will follow the example of the Lord and apply the principles involved to raising his children.

The second chapter of Ephesians provides an overview of the situation of lost man. We sin and deserve punishment. We ought to be punished and sometimes the consequences of our sins provide some punishment. But we do not live here forever; this life ends and if our sins are not forgiven, the next life will be an eternity of punishment (Matthew 25:46). We may wish all of our days that it is not so, but this is the way it is and there is nothing we can do about it.

Someone says, but we can change. What about

penitence? Yes, we can and indeed we must repent. But, if we could live the rest of our lives without a single sin, what can we do about our sins of the past? Well, by ourselves we cannot do anything. And as we know, this is where grace, the unmerited favor of God, comes in. Out of His bounty of Grace, He planned a way for us to be saved that required a perfect sacrifice that we are not able to offer. So He provided that sacrifice for us. His love for us sent His Son to the cross (John 3:16). We know this is true.

His plan of salvation requires obedience (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Jesus Christ Himself obeyed His Father (Hebrews 5:8-9). Those of us who are fathers with the responsibility of raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord must remember the thing that motivates obedience is the knowledge of God's love for us. We do not start teaching a lost person the Biblical doctrine of Baptism for remission of sins, though we most certainly do teach the lost that without obeying the gospel and being baptized into Christ there is no hope! But we do not start there. No, we start with the love that brought Jesus here. That love brought us grace and mercy. That love is the power (Romans 5:6-8).

So the first tool we reach for out of the toolbox of Bible knowledge is the tool of love. Fathers must be the chief and lead lovers in their homes. Yes, we provide, we lead, we correct, we admonish, but unless we really love the people, God has given us, everything else will return hollow. Now, this is real sacrificial love. This is not the love of a romance, nor is it the love of friendship. It is deeper than that. It is the love that reflects the definition provided in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 where the word "charity" is used for this most refined love: "Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave

itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” As Paul goes on to say, “Charity never faileth.” Love never fails. It is the one tool every father should reach for first. Even if he has to correct and punish, he must remember to love first and then again, yes, love again.

When I was a new father, I was also still a relatively new Christian. I made some mistakes with our boys. At some point in my maturation, it occurred to me that rather than bluff my way through my mistakes with Ginger and the boys, I ought to explain what I had done wrong and ask for their forgiveness. I should not have been surprised that it worked because, of course, that was God’s way. So we might add to our list of tools humility.

Thus, as we seek to obey Ephesians 6:4, we must remember to manifest all the tools God has given us. Out of the toolbox of Bible knowledge come the tools of chastisement and correction. Then we have the tools of love, grace and humility. It has often been said that a hard job is made much easier by having the right tools. Nothing is harder to do or more important to do right than being a good father. God has provided the best tools. It is up to us to use them well.

Chapter 11

Stretched To The Limit

Sidney White



We are living in a time, in a nation, and in a society that provides a great potential for happiness. Just look around you. Each family member old enough to drive has an automobile. Each family member has a cell phone of some sort. Even babies are given their own phones with which to play. Most homes have a television in several different rooms. IPads are commonplace. Many homes are more like college dormitories, each member with his or her own room, and each going his/her own way, gathering only to sleep in the same dorm (house). Yet, so many people talk about being **STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT** in one way or another. Some are stretched beyond the limit and drastic things happen.

By definition, **STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT** carries the idea of having hardly enough. Some speak of being stretched to the limit financially, as if they are having problems making ends meet. Yet they buy things that they “want”, and “needs” are not met. Others speak of being stretched to the limit with supplies to keep the family running smoothly (household needs, food, etc.). Others speak of being stretched to the limit as far as time is concerned. Yet they have time for

the things they want to do, and in many cases far less important than other areas where they need to be spending time. Some even speak of having their patience stretched to the limit.

In this study, we want to examine some of the possible causes of being STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT, then look at some of the possible solutions to the problem.

FABRIC OF AMERICAN LIFE

Through the Pew Research Center, we are provided a description of the FABRIC OF AMERICAN LIFE. Consider the following information provided by the PRC. (1) Most parents say that they are doing a good job raising their kids. (2) Most parents will say that raising their kids is enjoyable, it is rewarding and it is an important part of their overall identity. (3) Most parents are satisfied with the amount of time they spend with their children. (4) Only a minority say they feel rushed, and that being parents is tiring and stressful. (5) One out of ten say that they cannot make ends meet. (6) An overwhelming majority admit that parenting is tiring and stressful at times. (7) 31% say that they always feel rushed. (8) 53% say that they sometimes feel rushed. (9) 44% of parents, where they are married, both working, say that they do not spend enough time with their spouse.

When I consider my life, the life of my family, where do I fit as it relates to the above description? Do I feel stretched to the limit? Do I feel rushed? Is life tiring me out? For those who do feel these things about life, let us look at some of the causes of being STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT.

CAUSES OF BEING STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT

(1) “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break

through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). In the average family today, both the husband and the wife are working outside the home. In some cases, either one or both have two jobs. The reason is the accumulation of material things – bigger house, nicer cars, boats, country club memberships, etc. Often it is the case that this kind of lifestyle interferes with worship times. Then work is the excuse for forsaking the assembling of the saints. Also note in this regard, in the above statistics, where both parents are working, 44% say that they do not spend enough time with their spouse. This can have a devastating effect on the marriage.

(2) Stress can be caused by placing too much emphasis on sports. I know of families with 2 or 3 kids, and each of the kids is involved in 2 or 3 different sports. “Travel ball” is a big item for young people involved in sports. Coaches with little or no interest in spiritual matters will have practice sessions several times a week, plus a game or two as well. The argument I hear from parents is that if the kid doesn’t attend all practice sessions, the coach will not let him/her play in the games. Such activity soon replaces spiritual matters. It seems to me that we have two choices in such situations: (a) Miss practice and not get to play in the games, but be able to attend worship services and go to heaven, or (2) miss services, get to play in the games, but miss heaven in the process. Trying to make it all fit causes parents to be stretched to the limit.

(3) Oftentimes, our interest in the material things of life begin to interfere with our spiritual lives. The case of Mary and Martha would serve as a good example. Or perhaps the rich farmer of Luke 12 would be a good example.

In the latter section of scripture, Jesus was teaching a lesson on covetousness. He illustrated the lesson by the parable of a certain rich man. “And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:17-19). There is nothing in this parable to indicate his interest in doing good as he had opportunity (Galatians 6:10). There is no indication that he had an interest in helping those who were in need (James 2:15-16). There is no indication in this parable that he would have been interested in helping finance a mission trip. He was only interested in himself. The material had control of him. So often that happens today. We overload credit cards, borrow money from various sources, then begin to realize we have to pay it back. So many payments for so many material things cause us to be stretched to, or beyond the limits.

Think about Jesus’ teaching in the sermon on the mount. In Matthew 6:24ff, He begins a section of the sermon with, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). According to Vines’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, the word mammon is a common Aramaic word for riches. Then He goes on to talk about material things, what we eat, or what we drink, or our clothing. Now these things are necessities of life, yet His conclusion to this section is found as follows: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). If we are

to put spiritual matters before even the necessities of life, what would be our condition if we put non-necessities before the spiritual. And yet, that is what many people are doing.

(4) Another cause of many being stretched to the limit is that their priorities are upside down. Think for a moment what would happen if the elders of the average congregation decided that teachers in all the Bible classes were to give homework to the students. What do you think the reaction would be? You would hear about all the homework they have from school. You would hear what their bedtime is. You would hear how many nights each week they have those ballgames and practices that we mentioned earlier. There is just no time for Bible class homework. We have to make sure our children are educated and prepared for this life. We also have to make sure they are successful in multiple sports. Where is the consideration for their preparation for eternity? That is obviously at the bottom of the list.

Where do we have time in our busy schedules for family Bible study? Paul told Timothy, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Paul also reminds Timothy of the “unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and they mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Timothy 1:5). From these passages, it is evident that Timothy was taught at home. How much time do we spend in our homes, with the family, in Bible study? If we do not, what is the reason? Is it not enough time, or simply because it is not a priority in our schedules?

(5) Single parent households can certainly cause

one to be stretched to the limit. This certainly would be a more understandable situation. Imagine a single parent working to make a living, taking care of children's needs, preparing meals, doing the house cleaning, helping children with homework, shopping for the necessities of that home. Such would seem almost impossible for a single parent.

(6) Selfishness will definitely cause one to feel stretched to the limit. Such a person has little or no time for the wife (or husband, as the case may be). There would be little or no time for the children. In the case of a selfish wife, Paul gave some instruction when writing to Timothy: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:15). "Childbearing" involves the bringing in of a child but also the rearing of that child.

But some will say "I have my rights". When two people marry, they give up certain rights. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5:

"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye many give yourselves to fasting

and prayer: and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”

1 John 2:15-17 lists the three avenues of temptation: lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life. One word can sum up these three avenues – selfishness. Just suppose Christ had been selfish. Where would we be today?

In the book, *What Every Family Needs*; Faulkner/Brecheen, p.17; the authors list five steps to overcoming selfishness. They can be summed up in the following thoughts. (a) There has to be a degree of humility that will cause us to admit that we have the problem of selfishness. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith” of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20). (b) My faith has to be strong enough to help me live beyond selfishness. “For whosoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). (c) I must turn my life from serving self to serving others. “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). (e) “I must be willing to put the old man to death and resurrect a new one. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein” (Romans 6:2)? Colossians 3:1-17 stresses the same point. There are things that we must put off as a child of God, and selfishness is one of them. We put off the old man, and put on the new man. (f) I must restore, as much as in me is, the peace that has been lost by my self-centeredness.

Doing that will include repentance where wrong has been done, and apologies where feelings have been damaged. These steps will certainly eliminate a selfish attitude and life.

SOLUTIONS TO BEING STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT

To avoid a stressful situation, one needs a sense of purpose in life. Peter gives us a purpose for life in 1 Peter 4:11: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.” Peter stresses that what we speak is of utmost importance. And whatever we do is to be done to the praise of God and to glorify Him. Too often we have our own agenda, and that of a worldly or secular nature. At the same time we try to fit God in somewhere, our companion in somewhere, our kids in somewhere. The result is being stretched to the limit. If we will respect the teachings of Peter in this verse, things will run much more smoothly.

Not only must we have a sense of purpose in life, we must also prioritize. There is simply not enough time for anyone to do everything that he/she needs to do and wants to do. Too often it is the case that we spend our time doing what we want to do rather than what we need to be doing. There are things that have eternal rewards, or consequences, and there are things that have neither. We must decide to let some things go that make little or no difference. I have often asked the question, “What difference will it make 10 years from now?” What difference will it make an hour from now? We, as Christians, are a part of the family of God. We have responsibilities as the result of being sons of God. These responsibilities are far more important than earthly responsibility, especially things that we might enjoy doing.

As a part of the family of God, we are needed to fill our place. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul shows how each of us is a part of the body, with each body part having a function. If I allow things of the world to interfere with those responsibilities, I am hurting the body of Christ. I am letting my spiritual family down. But if I put first things first, then that which goes undone will not matter anyway. I once heard it put this way: “The first thing is to keep the first thing the first thing”.

In order to help eliminate stress, I must maintain a meaningful personal relationship with my Father. I love the way David begins the 23rd Psalm. “The Lord is MY (emp. sw) shepherd”. We must make our relationship with God very personal. In doing so, we will remember the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Note the three main points, or results of our diligent study of the word of God as stated in this verse. We should desire to be “approved of God”. We should desire to be a workman that is not ashamed, and we should be able to rightly divide, or handle aright, the word of truth. That will enable us to maintain that meaningful relationship with Him. Prayer will also help to maintain that relationship. Paul encourages us to pray. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6). As a result of that kind of diligent study and prayer life, we will be drawn closer to God

As a result of our meaningful personal relationship with God, we will then maintain a strong relationship as husband and wife. As in our relationship with God, our marriage relationship takes time and effort and energy. It doesn't just happen. We will not allow our children, our jobs, our recreational pursuits nor anything else to adversely affect

our marriage relationship. I have often heard couples say that when the kids leave home they will have to get reacquainted. That is so wrong and no doubt one of many reasons for so many divorces. Is that easy? Not at all. But to make time for God, our marriage companion and our kids, to avoid being stretched to the limit, we may have to leave off some of the things that we want for ourselves. We must put God first in our lives, our mates, then our children. Yes, we need time for self, but not to the exclusion of more important matters.

As we maintain our relationship with the Father, we will of necessity maintain a strong and meaningful relationship as parents with our children. According to Psalms 127:3, they are “an heritage of the Lord”. Children are a gift from God, and should be treated as such. As the result of bringing children into the world, there is a responsibility on the part of both parents and children. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6: 1-4). Our desire for our children to be active in the community, participating in different recreational pursuits often causes us to put them before God, and before our marriage partners. We allow our own interests in recreational pursuits to interfere in our relationship with God, our mate and our children. Then when we should be involved in the work of God, the mate is wanting us to be involved with him/her, and the children are complaining because we spend no time with them. We feel stretched to the limit. . . .as we should be under those conditions.

CONCLUSION

Being stretched to the limit (or beyond) is not unique to any of us. We probably have all felt that way at times in our lives. But when we decide to refocus, keeping the first thing the first thing, then other things will fall into place or be left out altogether.

Chapter 12

Raising Up Godly Leaders

Derrick Coble



It is the desire of many parents that their children be like them. Men often want sons to train in certain trades, sports, or activities in the same areas in which they learned. Women often long for daughters to share in their interests of shopping, cooking, and various hobbies. It is only natural to feel this way, as parents see their own image reflected through their children by the way they look and behave (the same way that God looks at us). “God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27) and every person is counted as “his offspring” (Acts 17:28). But, His ultimate desire is for all to repent and follow Him to be a part of His spiritual family (1 Timothy 2:4; 3:15). Only then can a person say he is God’s son or daughter (2 Corinthians 6:18). Once that is accomplished, the heavenly Father wants His children to be like Him—GODLY (Ephesians 5:1; Titus 2:12).

Godliness is defined as, “Respect for God that affects the way a person lives” (Strong). It is the “reverent awareness of God’s sovereignty over every aspect of life, and the attendant determination to honor him in all one’s conduct” (Chamblin). Of all the New Testament writers, the apostles

Peter and Paul emphasize godliness the most. Perhaps these two men were inspired with this wisdom, because they could speak from a background of experience when they did not act godly. For Peter, he knew the shame associated with denying the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75), so he encouraged all Christians to add godliness into their lives along with holy living (2 Peter 1:3; 3:11). Paul was one who was completely against Jesus (Acts 26:9). Yet, when met with seeing the Lord's glory personally, he drastically changed his conduct (Acts 9:3,4,20). He then realized the importance of leading people in godliness and raising godly leaders like Titus and Timothy. The commands he issued involved following after godliness (1 Timothy 6:11) and denying ungodliness (Titus 2:12), knowing it is "great gain" in the life of every Christian (1 Timothy 6:6).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOME

From the beginning, God designed the home to be a training ground for godliness. As Psalm 127:1 states, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." God did build the first home with a father, mother, and children (Genesis 2-4). Apparently, the first children were taught by their parents to sacrifice to the Lord (Genesis 4:1-4). Even though Cain and Abel were taught this aspect of godly behavior, the onset of sin in the world still plagued them (Gen. 4:8). Nonetheless, the patriarchs did realize the importance of training their children in godliness. In fact, when Enos was born to Seth, it is said, "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4:26). With this statement, the lineage of Seth is recognized as godly versus the lineage of Cain. From this family, came Enoch who "walked with God" and had sons and daughters which he undoubtedly trained in

godliness before God “took him” (Genesis 5:22-24). There is also the example of Noah who was a “just man and perfect in his generations” (Genesis 6:9). He taught his children (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) which lead to their salvation from the worldwide flood (Gen. 7:13). Later, God said that Abraham, would “command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD” (Genesis 18:19). The emphasis on training children in godliness continued under the Mosaic Age. Moses wrote:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And they shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

With these words, God formally commanded families to raise their children learning godly principles. Teaching diligently implies a repetition of learning. It takes time and patience for parents to actively train their children. God wanted His people to look for opportunities to teach all throughout every day and night. Under this law, the Israelites would even place reminders around so as not to neglect God’s command. John A. Thompson recorded:

The present passage, along with 11:13-21, Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16, was written on small

scrolls, placed in small leather containers and bound on the forehead and the left arm when the Shema was recited . . . A further practice developed, that of enclosing these four passages in a small container for attaching to the doorpost of one's house. Ancient copies of these documents have been found in the Qumran caves and elsewhere (138).

Thus, it is clear that the Israelites took this command seriously at first and truly desired to raise up godly leaders in their homes.

Under New Testament law, God still expects training to be done in the home. Fathers are commanded to bring their children up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Mothers are commanded to “guide the house” (1 Timothy 5:14) which includes taking care of their children and setting forth a godly example before them. This is needed in our country perhaps now more than ever as an estimated 24.7 million children live without their biological father (The Extent of Fatherlessness). The example of Timothy's home is definitely one to emulate. Even though there is very little revealed about his father in the home, what is revealed concerning his upbringing is positive. Paul commended Timothy saying, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). Timothy had sincere faith because of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). They took the time to explain to him the Scriptures at an early age because they wanted him to grow up mature in the faith as a “man of God” (2 Timothy 3:17). Because of their attention to making him wise in the Scriptures, Timothy grew up to be a godly

leader and “workfellow” of the apostle Paul (Romans 16:21).

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN MEN

Not only does the home play an important role in raising up godly leaders, but the church does as well. The church and the home must work together as both are built upon the foundation of Jesus the Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). As with most of the New Testament teaching on godliness, it is the apostle Paul who encouraged Titus “to set things in order” by guiding the Christians in Crete on the proper way to act. Paul detailed several specific qualities of older and younger Christian men (Titus 2:1,2,6-8). The older men Paul had in mind would likely be from 50 to 60 years old (Faithlife Corporation). The first quality of the older man is sober. This describes a man who knows you have to be alert to stand against Satan (Ephesians 6:13,14). He is watching for the return of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:6) and not careless or indifferent toward the church. The second quality is grave. In other words, one who is honorable, worthy of respect, and of good character (Louw). He is serious about the Lord’s work and would certainly be mindful of his example to raise up younger men as godly leaders. The third quality is temperate. This is essentially the same as being self-controlled or restraining the passions (Bullinger). The older man should be able to pass along experience in this area as he would have faced many battles throughout his life between the flesh and spirit (Galatians 5:17). The apostle Paul himself also knew about bringing the body into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). The fourth quality is sound in faith. He has a healthy view of the Gospel and is a doer of the Word (James 1:22). The fifth and sixth qualities are love and patience. The picture is

of a man who has a dedicated commitment to God no matter what. He will be steadfast till the end of his life. All of these qualities are important to exhibit for older Christian men who are leading the way for the younger to be leaders in the church. Nonetheless, younger Christian men are not exempt from godly lives. If the older Christian men comprise those who are 50 to 60 years and above, then the younger men are the ones who most likely still have children under their instruction. It can be said that the older Christian fathers guide the younger Christian fathers, as the younger Christian fathers guide their children. Younger Christian men must be a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7). This is a prototype or a model that one can follow and duplicate. The areas that must be duplicated include: being sober minded (making good judgments), uncorrupt doctrine (teaching and living the pure doctrine of Christ), gravity/sincerity (taking the work of being a Christian seriously), and “sound speech, that cannot be condemned” (Titus 2:6-8).

In ancient Greek society, fathers were not expected to be nurturers. Many young men today have been raised in families where fathers have neglected their responsibilities to their wives and children. Husbands and fathers who are good examples of Christian living are important role models for young men who need to see how it is done (Barton 272-273).

When all these principles encompass a man’s life, the home will naturally be a place where children learn what it means to be godly leaders in the home, church, and community.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN

On the reverse side, what would the church do without faithful Christian women who humbly serve God? Great women of God embrace the fact that He created them in a supportive position—not a dominating one (1 Corinthians 11:9; 1 Timothy 2:15). As husbands love and lead in a Christ-like way (Ephesians 5:25), wives are to show reverence for their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). It is important to note that Paul did not neglect the details of godliness for older and younger Christian women (Titus 2:3,4). Women today are bombarded with the idea that their interests or desires come first. In our permissive society, they are told they must seek what makes them happy and pursue it without any reservations (Barton 269). To raise a generation of godly women, each must realize that God’s ways come first (Colossians 3:2). Again, Paul has advice for those women who are 50 to 60 years old and above. First, they must be reverent in behavior. The sense of the word is literally, “to carry into daily life the demeanour of priestesses in a temple” (Knight 306). It could be said that “however a woman acts in the worship assembly is how she should act when she leaves.” These women are active students of the Scriptures, meek, humble, and God-fearing servants. Second, women are instructed against being false accusers. The modern term would be “gossipers” (Barton 268). It is actually derived from the Greek term in which we get the word, “devil.” Basically, Paul is encouraging godly women to avoid talking like the Devil; being careful not to say things in a malicious way to intentionally hurt the character or reputation of someone. The third characteristic is not given to much wine. It seems that drunkenness was common in Crete and the elderly who

relied heavily on alcohol as medicine needed to know not to abuse it (Jackson 335). Christian women could not be like God (godly) and enslaved to alcohol at the same time (Romans 6:12,17). The final characteristic for the older women is to be teachers of good things. This is not public preaching (1 Timothy 2:12), but it is an indication that the older Christian women have a big part in raising younger Christian women in godliness by their words and example. The church certainly needs more older Christian sisters who do not feel like they have “served their time” in their younger days. The advice and experience of someone who has already faced the challenges and joys involved in marriage and motherhood can be invaluable for younger ladies in serving as God desires. Next, Paul turns to the younger women (Titus 2:4,5). It could be that some young women did not have the proper Christian example in the home in the formative years. That makes Paul’s command that much more necessary for the older to work in helping to train the younger. The first area of concern is teaching them to love their husbands and children. In 2014, USA Today reported that “450 children are killed every year by their parents . . . Nearly 40% of children killed by their mothers were less than a year old” (Bello and Hoyer). It is tragic that some ladies do not have “natural affection” (2 Timothy 3:3) when it comes to their children. Yet, older women in the church can help the younger to embrace their God-given role in lovingly respecting their husbands and lovingly raising their children (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Timothy 2:15). Second, Paul informs them to be discreet/chaste. Perhaps, self-control would be a good word here (Arndt). The younger ladies must control their thoughts, tongues, and temper, ultimately keeping themselves pure in every way. Next, comes the injunction to be keepers at home. Other

translations indicate that women should be “homemakers” (NKJV) or “workers at home” (ASV). With the rise of feminism, this characteristic is generally shunned in modern society. Yet, women of God understand that this in no way hinders them to be productive outside the home—Lydia and Priscilla both demonstrated this (Acts 16:14; 18:3). The point is, that if women are to be godly and raise godly leaders in their home, their primary emphasis must be on the home. Finally, these ladies must be good and obedient to their own husbands. The older Christian women would have learned patience to pass along to the younger. This constitutes a good natured and considerate attitude, even conveying the idea of “not being irritable” (Moss 160). Certainly, women have many demands placed upon them and it is natural to get a little “grumpy” from time to time. However, remembering to keep a positive attitude and not dealing harshly with her husband or children will go a long way in making the home the godly training ground it should be. Young ladies and girls in the home can be raised as godly leaders with the understanding they do not exercise authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). They might excel in serving and building others up like Phoebe (Romans 16:1,2). Some might use a teaching talent to instruct children or other women like Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9). Ladies can be especially good at exhorting like Priscilla (Acts 18:26), showing mercy like Dorcas (Acts 9:36), or even giving like the women who supported Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). There is something that each Christian woman can do to glorify God in an acceptable way (Matthew 5:16).

CONCLUSION

All in all, raising up godly leaders begins with us! Children are an heritage of the Lord (Psalms 127:3) and

God expects each father and mother to train them in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). Yet, the help of other godly people is also valuable. Paul could say, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Philippians 3:17). Moses and Aaron became godly leaders because of their parents (Exodus 2:1-10). Samuel was raised as a godly leader with the help of Eli, the priest (1 Samuel 2:1-11) and young Timothy learned from his family, as well as, the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:14). Let each Christian remember, “godliness is profitable unto all thing, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (2 Timothy 4:8).

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Chapter 13

The Church Helping The Church

Sam Willcut



I am very honored to be a part of the storied “Truth In Love” lectureship. In the grand theme of “The Family of God,” my topic is “The Church Helping the Church.” One of the grandest blessings possible in our lives is the multiplied blessings associated with being members of the church (Ephesians 1:3). In fact, to contemplate what navigating this life without Christ and His church would be like is a nightmare, and we see the tragedies and wrecks of people’s lives in such circumstances scattered about us daily. Countless millions attempt to cope with the vast problems of life without God and His family by turning to drugs, alcohol and a plethora of other worldly things that leave them coming to the same conclusion as Solomon: “Vanity of vanity, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Nevertheless, for the Christian who understands that the church is “the house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15), we would never dream of trying to sail the storms of life without the aid of our spiritual family. Of the many ways that the Holy Spirit illustrated the church of Christ by revelation, the portrait of a family is the loveliest portrait of all. As Mac Layton wrote, “In this family of God,

there is security, love, and fellowship. And there are mutual responsibilities that each has toward the other” (249-50). Indeed, when the church is helping the church, the brethren within the family of God are representing exactly what Christ, the head of His church (Ephesians 1:22-23), intended.

The New Testament largely comprises letters written both to congregations and individual Christians, so we would not think it strange in the least to consider that these twenty-seven books are replete with admonitions of the church helping the church, whether it be visiting the sick, providing resources to each other for proper study of God’s word, training the servants (and leaders) of tomorrow, sending missionaries out to stabilize congregations in struggling locations, and defending the precious bride of Christ from those wolves “in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15-20). Concerning this, Wendell Winkler has written, “You and I, as individual members, owe something to the local church. This is true by virtue of our membership therein. Because we are members of our families, we owe something to them.... Such is also true with the local church. This is [also] true by virtue of the blessings we receive from being members thereof...we enjoy in and through the local church the bond of fellowship, the strength of edification, the joy of public worship, the balm of comfort, and the lift of encouragement” (10). For all that we may say on this subject, let me see if I may come close to encapsulating it with the following three points.

WHEN I THINK OF THE CHURCH HELPING THE CHURCH, I THINK OF ONE WORD—“EDIFY.”

When thinking about the church helping the church, the New Testament word “edify” rises like butter rising from within the churned cream (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:26; Romans

14:19). According to W. E. Vine, the Greek word *oikodomeo*, translated as “edify” in our English New Testaments, “is used metaphorically, in the sense of edifying, promoting the spiritual growth of character of believers, by teaching or by example, suggesting such spiritual progress as the result of patient labor” (Volume 2, 18). Therefore, when we think about the design of the Lord’s church in this respect, we are minded of the language that Paul uses in Ephesians 4:11-16: “...for the edifying of the body of Christ...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children...may grow up into him in all things...unto the edifying of itself in love.” Indeed, among all the things that we Christians need to be doing for one another to build each other up and help one another go to heaven, it is all rooted in love: “...charity edifieth” (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Before Rubel Shelly became apostate, he wrote an excellent booklet about the Lord’s church, and in it, he discusses this important duty: “...the desired end of all efforts at edification is the strengthening of the body of Christ” (62). Every congregation should be regularly self-assessing themselves with the following questions: Is there evidence of spiritual growth in the congregation among the members (cf. 2 Peter 3:18)? Are souls being saved because of the work of the congregation? Are we accomplishing more than we were five years ago? Is peace reigning in the hearts and lives of the members? Are the members demonstrating fruit of maturing lives (Galatians 5:22-23)? All of these will show whether the church is helping the church with edification.

Finally, in his book, “The New Testament Church” (29), Roy E. Cogdill encourages us also to consider the things that both hinder spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:1; Hebrews 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:10) and

promote spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:13-14; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; Titus 1:11-14; Philippians 4:5-7).

**WHEN I THINK OF THE CHURCH HELPING
THE CHURCH, I THINK OF ONE
PHRASE — “...ONE ANOTHER.”**

In our New Testament, we find this phrase “one another” many times, and it is an important phrase, especially in drawing the very point of my lesson—this phrase reinforces the church helping the church. Note just a few examples.

We are to “love one another” (John 13:34-35). In this passage, Jesus added a “new” dimension to this command: “... as I have loved you,” demonstrated by his selfless, serving love. Because an entire lesson has been devoted to this topic, let me be as brief as I can. The new covenant mentions frequently the subject of love (Mark 12:28-34; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 4:19-20). The church really needs to do a better job of loving one another, including understanding that love is not suspicious in nature (1 Corinthians 13:5), practices the Golden Rule at all times (Matthew 7:12), and always follows Jesus as our ultimate role model in displaying brotherly love.

We are to “have the same care one for another” (1 Corinthians 12:25). While this lectureship has examined the church as the family of God, Paul also illustrates the church in terms of a body, and in First Corinthians 12, he illustrates the members of a congregation as different body parts, making the point that each are distinct and important simultaneously (1 Corinthians 12:14-24), so that no member can look upon another as unnecessary or undervalued. Then, he draws his concluding solution to the “schism” that plagued the Corinth congregation in that they were to care for each other, seen both in suffering with one another and supporting

one another (1 Corinthians 12:25-27; cf. Romans 12:15).

We are to “admonish one another” (Romans 15:14). Have you ever been discouraged? Have you ever been encouraged by a brother or sister in Christ? This is the design of the church—we are to emulate the example of Barnabas by admonishing and encouraging one another. In his book, “Rise Up and Build,” Neal Pollard lists a group of individuals whom we may encourage: the young, the elderly, the sick, the new Christian, the new member, the overlooked and the visitor (89-98).

We are to develop the disposition of “forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:31-32). The apostle Paul explains perfectly the reason and manner for forgiving our brethren: “... even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Jesus taught that our forgiveness directly hinges on our ability to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). While God laid out a perfect path of reconciliation (Matthew 5:22-26; 18:15-20), the innocent party should always take the first step in reconciliation, if for no other reason than because God, the innocent party offended by my sins, took the first step to forgiving me (cf. John 3:16).

We are to be “teaching” one another “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). While the first part of the Great Commission is evangelism, the second part of the Great Commission from our Lord Jesus Christ is the church helping the church in terms of maturity (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). For example, this is why Paul and Barnabas spent an entire year in Antioch and “taught much people” (Acts 11:26), and this is also why they went on their second missionary journey. While we should never diminish the need to evangelize, let us not be lopsided and neglect this equally important part of the Lord’s command.

We are to “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

This is the ultimate expression of the church helping the church. We can accomplish this when we not only make unity our top goal (Ephesians 4:3), but we also have the disposition of putting others ahead of ourselves (Philippians 2:3), just as Jesus did for us (2 Corinthians 8:9).

WHEN I THINK OF THE CHURCH HELPING THE CHURCH, I THINK OF ONE ILLUSTRATION—THE BENEVOLENT ACTIONS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH.

One of the greatest examples of the church helping the church is when the apostle Paul was raising money for aiding the church in Jerusalem and Judea that was afflicted by a severe famine (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; cf. Galatians 2:10; 6:2-10; Romans 15:25-29). In speaking specifically with the church in Corinth concerning this aid, Paul wrote to them a second time, and Second Corinthians 8-9 forms a rich in-depth passage that speaks to this subject. Yet, the context of these two chapters in the second epistle to Corinth demonstrates that the comfort of God creates a desire within His people of wanting to help and comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Thus, since the saints in Judea and Jerusalem were suffering, Paul urges them to help these Christians by comforting them. The church in Corinth had promised to contribute, but up until now, they had failed to deliver, whether it was because some of the Corinthian Christians accusing Paul of double-talk by not taking support from them (1 Corinthians 9:17-18) and then turning around and asking money from them, or maybe it was the influence of false teachers that plagued Paul everywhere he went, including Corinth. He motivated the brethren to help their fellow-brethren by utilizing two examples: “the churches of Macedonia,” of which we know three (Philippi—

Acts 16:11-15, Thessalonica—Acts 17:1-10 and Berea—Acts 17:11-14), and “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 8:1-9). Thus, Paul demonstrates in multiple scriptures that the church can help the church in a benevolent way. We have seen this demonstrated countless times whenever emergencies occur and brethren find themselves in need.

Now, please do not misunderstand me—through this point, I am not advocating that the church cannot be benevolent to those outside the body of Christ, and it is unfortunate that we had to fight that argument from among the Lord’s people decades ago. The New Testament is quite clear that the Lord expects His church to care for the needy, widows and orphans (cf. Galatians 2:10; 6:6-10; James 1:27; 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17), even if we are to focus first on our brethren.

CONCLUSION

When I consider all of the many blessings associated with the church helping the church, this ought to “strike with a death knell” the excuse of not placing membership with the local congregation. Even when the young convert, Saul of Tarsus, left Damascus and arrived in Jerusalem, Luke records that he “assayed to join himself to the disciples” (Acts 9:26). Yes, they needed encouragement from the Encourager, Barnabas, to welcome him, but the relatively new convert knew the benefits of identifying with the church in Jerusalem.

The closest portrait we have of Judgment Day is found in Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus paints for us what will happen when He returns. The striking words are expressed from each side of the divided group: “Lord, when saw we thee in need and helped thee?” “Lord, when saw we thee in need and did not help thee?” In crystal clear language, our Lord answers, “Verily I say unto you,

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). Yes, it is when the church helps the church that we have the surest language on mortal tongue explaining how we may not only be the most Christ-like, but how we may gain our eternal inheritance into “life eternal” (cf. Matthew 25:46).

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Chapter 14

The Church Helping The Home



Johnie Scaggs

Of the three institutions God ordained, He instituted the church and the home. The other institution is the government (as far as the laws which they enforce upon their subjects can and often will change). Laws today in our society are different to some degree than they were when many of us grew up. We can help affect these laws from the voting booth. Governments can become evil and attempt to enforce laws which go against the law of God. And then of course we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

The laws, however, which regulate the church and the home are from God. They are not made up by men. When the government attempts to regulate these laws from God, chaos will always be the result. For example, the Bible teaches that men must work to provide for his family, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8). Governments might provide for people on welfare, so they do not have to work. “Depend

on us” they say, “and we will provide for all your needs.” This type of law will affect the home and the church as well. The government encourages women to have children out of wedlock, so they can get more money from the government, so they can be more dependent upon them for their needs. This works toward the breakdown of the family. Today we are dealing with issues in society which generations before us did not have to deal with. Such as children being raised up in one-parent households. When one parent is no longer in the home, there is a breakdown in the makeup of the home as God has designed it to be and thus it will affect the church and society in general.

According to Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009, a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau every two years (and most recently in December 2011), there are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States today, and those parents are responsible for raising 22 million children. May 22, 2018 - <https://www.verywellfamily.com/single-parent-census-data-2997668> 1

Of the twenty-seven deadliest mass shooters in American history, twenty-six had a common characteristic: they were raised in a family unit without the father. This is not something that is in the future: it is what we in the church must deal with today! How do we help with these families and others who are raising children? How can the church help these families to deal with the problems of this generation and be more spiritually minded and less worldly?

**BY TEACHING THE HOME THE
IMPORTANCE OF THE HOME**

As the church, we must understand the important role the home plays in the overall development of a nation and how the home will affect the church in society. We need to be teaching lessons to the home about the important role it plays in the life of its children which will in turn affect the church and the government.

The hope of America is not found in its scientific advancements, intellectual acumen, or military might; rather, the hope of America is in the establishment and maintenance of Christian homes. The home is the true source of civilization; and, that nation which does not give proper regard to the sanctity of the home is prepared for barbarism. No nation can rise above the faith, ideals, and standards of its home. Home life is an index to the strength and stability of any nation. And, when family life breaks down, the nation has no promise of the future. Gibbons stated that one of the reasons Rome fell was the rapid increase of divorce and the undermining of the sanctity of the home. 2

These words written 39 years ago are still true today and they will be true for all generations to come. We have an immense responsibility to help the home be all it can be in light of the grave dangers that disturb our society.

**BY TEACHING THE HOME THE IMPORTANCE
OF TRAINING THEIR CHILDREN
IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD**

I believe Bible classes are critical in the overall growth of the church, but Bible classes will never fill the void in a child's life when teaching at home has been neglected. "It has been said, Let every father and mother realize that when their child is three years old, they have done more than half they will ever do for his character." 3

Homes must be taught about their responsibility of teaching and training their children in the ways of the Lord. I firmly believe that many parents do not take time to teach or train their children. Their answer to the education of their children as it concerns the Bible is the same as how it relates to their secular education: "Let someone else do it." This is not what God has taught about the responsibility of the home as it relates to teaching and training our children. Moses wrote:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they

depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children, (Deuteronomy 4:5-10).

Fathers and mothers, teaching your children the way of the LORD might be the most important responsibility you have toward your children.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates, (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Every parent should set aside time daily to read and study the Bible with their children. The greatest gift you will give your child is a knowledge of God's word and a thirst to learn more about God. I have watched parents push their children into sports, desire them to be popular in school, and buy them all the latest things of the present fad. All the while they neglected to teach their children about the LORD

and when they grow up and become adults, then the parents wonder, “Why do my children want nothing to do with church?” The answer, “Because that is what you taught them.”

Remember the words of Paul, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1-4).

BY TEACHING THE HOME THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING THEIR CHILDREN TO RESPECT AUTHORITY

I believe there is a real problem facing us today concerning respect for authority. Once again, this starts in the home. If children do not respect the authority that parents have in the home, they will not respect the authority of God either. Peter said, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:17). The word “honour” has couched within its meaning of the idea of respect. Hence, we are to show respect to all men, also showing respect to the king or those in a place of authority.

As authority relates to the home, the Bible teaches us that we are to show respect to our parents. “Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3). Children are to honor or show respect to their parents. Because we live in an age that no longer teaches discipline in the home, children do not have in many places any respect for their parents or authority in

general. When a child grows up and does not respect authority at home, he/she will most likely not respect the authority of police officers, judges, teachers, and most certainly, the authority of elders and of God. This will cause grave problems for both the society and the church. Respect is one of the most foundational and important lessons we will ever teach our children, respecting elders to respecting people with different backgrounds and all those in different places of authority.

One of the main principles of the golden rule is to show respect to others. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). This must be taught in the home, if it is to be lived out in the lives of the children. When moms and dads do not treat others by the standard of the golden rule, how can they expect their children to do different? One of the things I remember well about my home growing up was how to show respect to others, both to adults and my peers. I wanted the same for my children and so should every home. There is nothing wrong with teaching children to say “Yes sir,” “No sir,” “Yes ma’am,” and “No ma’am.” Paul said, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;” (Romans 12:10). “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

**BY TEACHING THE HOME TO TEACH
THEIR CHILDREN WHAT IS
IMPORTANT IN LIFE**

Priorities are the one thing we must instill in the home of every family in the body of Christ! If the home does not

understand the need for showing that Christ and His church are more important than anything else, then all hope is lost. Too many parents are teaching their children by their own example that other things are more important than the Lord's church. They tend to emphasize sports, school activities, being popular in school, etc., over the church. You ask, how do they do this? By placing these events above events that relate to the church. Too many parents late in life begin to wonder, "Why are my children leaving the church?" Because too many parents taught their children that church was not really all that important. Getting ahead in society was far more important than attending church services and worshipping the Lord. We should remember the words of the Lord. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:31-33). In this same chapter He said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Wendell Winkler wrote:

They are too busy heaping up this world's goods. They are more interested in their flocks than their families, in their herds than their homes in their crops than their children, in their money than their marriage, in their

business than their boys. Was Socrates right when he said 2,000 years ago: ‘Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim, ‘Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all.’ 4

It is so sad to see the lives of children turned upside down because parents cared more for the things of this world than the things of eternity.

**BY TEACHING THE HOME THE
IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING THEIR
CHILDREN TO RESPECT THE
MORAL AND ETHICAL LAWS OF GOD**

Along with the many things my parents taught us as little children were these two principles: (1) there is only “one church” and (2) when you marry, you marry for life! Over the years, I have not forgotten these two great lessons. Worldliness will destroy the purity of the home. We live in a very worldly world today and it seems to be getting worse. Divorce is commonplace today. I remember when our daughter came home on one occasion and asked us, “When are you all going to get a divorce?” We asked her, “Why would she ask such a question?” and she responded by replying that all the other kid’s moms and dads in school were divorced. How sad to think that divorce is so common that children think it is the norm.

Children need to be taught that when you enter into a marriage, it is to last for life. Furthermore, marriage is between a man and a woman. This is what is approved by God. God does not now, nor has He ever approved of two men marrying

or two women marrying. Jesus said, "...Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 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 19:4-6). In verse 19, Jesus gave the one and only exception to this rule on the law of marriage between man and woman and that is upon the grounds of fornication one may put away the guilty party and the innocent one may marry with God's approval. Paul said, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). If we would teach our children to enter into a contract with God and their spouse that they will honor God's law on this matter, that would go a long way in resolving the moral decay of our society.

We are not to love the world, but rather we are to love the things of God. John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). It would seem in many places that we as a society have things turned upside down. We no longer call good things good and bad things bad. Many seem not to be able to draw lines of distinction between evil and good. Remember the words of the prophet: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). These words are still true today; we must choose between good and evil.

The way to keep the church pure is to first keep the home pure; if the home is pure, then that will in turn spill over into the church.

CONCLUSION

Each heading has started with “By teaching the Home...” The only way we will turn the tide on the onslaught of the home is by teaching. Teaching the home is of the utmost importance. If we could get every parent to realize the impact they have, then the society, the church, and the world would look different. Though the church can never take the place of the home in motivating and training children in service for Christ, the church can augment and supplement this motivation and training. If it is the mission of the whole church to preach the whole gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Timothy 3:15), then it is the mission of the church to perform, act upon, or to do whatever is inherent in the discharging of this responsibility. 5

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Chapter 15

The Church And Home Working Together

Johnie Scaggs



The church is made up of people who are called the children of God (Romans 8:16-17). Or one can say that we are the family of God. Each family within the church family is a single unit which makes up the whole church and as such we must come together to work together to achieve our highest goal of attaining heaven as our eternal home.

The church must help the home and likewise the home must help the church. The Bible says we are co-workers. As Paul wrote, “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Also, “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Corinthians 3:9-10). As we work together with God, surely, we can understand that we are to work together with each other. We are to build each other up in the most holy faith. “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). “Let us

therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).

For the church and the home to work together, there are some things which as the church we must understand and likewise the home must understand some things about the church.

WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY MEMBER IS IMPORTANT

One of the most crucial things we can do in the overall work of the church is to help Christians understand their immense value in the overall work of the church. Many families might feel as if they have been left behind and that they are of no value to the church. As the church and the home work together, this is an area it is imperative to improve on. On separate occasions, Paul taught us how that every part of the body is important.

Notice Paul’s words in Romans 12:3-8:

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth,

on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it
with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence;
he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul said God has “dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Because of this great truth, no one is to think more highly of himself than he ought to. The measure of faith has been given to every man. This faith is not speaking about “the faith” which one obeys upon hearing the word of God, but the faith one has upon receiving the gifts God gave in the first century church that would determine the gift they would receive. Though there were different gifts, each one was important and unique for the glory of God, not for self-praise. No matter the gift, in the overall work it is only a part of the picture: all the other gifts given would complete the picture.

In like manner, Paul again uses the analogy of the human body to describe the function of the church in 1 Corinthians 12. He describes each part of the body as being dependent upon other parts of the body. For the body to be whole, the eye is needed as well as the ears, etc. He then makes this statement:

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have
no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet,
I have no need of you. Nay, much more those
members of the body, which seem to be more
feeble, are necessary: And those members of
the body, which we think to be less honourable,
upon these we bestow more abundant honour;
and our uncomely parts have more abundant
comeliness. For our comely parts have no
need: but God hath tempered the body together,
having given more abundant honour to that

part which lacked (1 Corinthians 12:21-24).

Unfortunately, churches can form within themselves cliques to the exclusion of others; in doing so we may in some cases do great harm to some. We need to be more cautious lest we do harm to those who are not included. Inclusiveness is vital for the church and for family. Those who are strong ought to help the weak and as a family we should be more sensitive to the needs of other family members. Paul said, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (Romans 15:1-2). When the church and the home are working together in the manner God wants us to do, we will understand the needs of each other, and we will see that not everyone in the family is strong and thus some will need more help than others. We should make sure that all are taken care of. A good case study of this is in the early days of the church when a conflict came up in the church about the Grecians widows. According to Acts 6:1 they were being neglected in the daily ministration. The apostles appointed twelve men to see to their needs and make sure they were not being neglected any longer. And what was the result of these widows being taken care of and all the whole family being ministered to? “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The same can and will take place today if we do likewise.

THE CHURCH AND THE HOME MUST BE UNITED

Over the years, one thing I have seen that has hindered the church and the home from being able to

do all they could do is the lack of being united together.

Not long ago, I was eating with some members of the church after morning services and folks from another religious group in town. As they were walking by, all I could hear were complaints about how long their preacher had preached that morning. “Oh,” they said, “he just does not know when to stop preaching,” “he just does not understand we cannot sit that long,” et al. On and on they went on talking about their preacher. What, (let us be honest,) kind of impression did these folks leave those who heard them? Maybe the preacher did speak too long; I do not know, I was not there. But what I do know is this behavior is detrimental. If we are going to ever work together and help each other grow, we must learn to respect, talk, and listen to each other.

One of the problems in the First Century church was division. Paul said:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

They were following men and not Christ. Paul said

they were carnal.

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).”

These were carnal and not spiritual minded and as such were unable to look to Christ as they should have. We are not to follow after men but rather we are to follow Christ. Mankind is subject to weakness, but not Christ! We are all growing in Christ and thus we should understand none of us have reached the goal yet. We are all still working toward that goal and as such we should remember the words of Paul, “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Elders, preachers, and members ought to be sensitive to the needs of others. They should ask themselves, “Are we being spiritual in these matters or are we carnal?” “What is the real reason we are upset?” is the question we should be asking ourselves.

Wise men of old understood this concept of unity and the important part it would play in one’s life. David said, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;” (Psalm 133:1-2). Solomon wrote these words:

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).”

Not all unity is healthy. In Numbers 13, the twelve spies brought back an evil report and disheartened the people of Israel. Only two believed they could take the land. Had they been united together with God’s will in this matter, that generation indeed could have taken the land. Because of this event, the entire generation that came out of Egypt with the exception of Joshua and Caleb died in the wilderness. But healthy unity can accomplish remarkable things. The children of Israel were able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah because they were united in one purpose. “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6). If we would work together as they did in building the walls of Jerusalem, what remarkable things we could carry out for the cause of Christ!

When we lose sight of who we are and how we are to work together, we are in for great problems within the framework of the church. We must strive to bring all members together and strengthen each other. Paul said, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).

He also said, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). He went on to say, “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:13-15).

THE CHURCH AND THE HOME MUST REALIZE THERE IS A WORK TO DO

We often sing the song “Work for the night is coming, when man’s work is done.” Do we believe this phrase? Must we work? Is there coming a time when man’s work is done? If we honestly believe this to be true, we would get to work. There is a magnificent work to be done still today. The work of the church involves the home working together in harmony with the church to carry out the will of God. I believe the work of the church can be stated in two words: “save souls.” How do we do this? Through (1) evangelism, (2) edification, and (3) benevolence. To accomplish this, the church and the home will have to work together. There is much to do, and it is a critical time that we carry out the business of doing the work of our Father.

When we think about evangelism, we most often think in terms of the lost in a world-wide sense. But what about evangelism in the home? If we as the church could teach each soul in the family, what would eventually happen throughout the world? When Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20). He was including those in the home, the make-up of the family. The church and the home must work together in making sure that every member of a family is learning how to become a Christian and then how to grow and remain faithful as a Christian. This calls upon us to be honest with our needs. Elders need to listen to the needs of family members. As a preacher in many churches, I was not always able to sit in for Bible Class to make sure my children were being taught the truth in some areas. It was unfortunate that we had at times teachers who were not digging into the Bible, only playing games. In many situations of this nature instead of being concerned, people let it go. But that is not the answer! Elders need to be made aware so they can help ensure the children grow up in Christ into maturity.

This was the case with Lois and Eunice who taught Timothy “from a babe the holy scriptures....” (2 Timothy 1:5). They did not play games with Timothy, they were concerned about his knowledge of the scriptures. This is what helped him be the man he was and because of their devotion to teaching the word of God to Timothy, he in turn was able to grow into a full mature man in the Lord and do remarkable things in the kingdom of God. The edification of others is one of the greatest works within the church and one that will produce the greatest joys. Paul said, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). He also said, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19). The Hebrews writer said it this way, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:” (Hebrews 10:24).

We should also strive to see the needs in the local families when it comes to benevolent needs. When Paul was given the right hand of fellowship from Peter, James, and John as it related to his ministry to the Gentiles, they asked of him this one thing: “Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do” (Galatians 2:10). Later Paul wrote, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). As God is a benevolent God, so He wants of His people to do likewise and especially to His family, the church, and the families that make up the church. Through our benevolent work we can enhance the work between the church and the home. There are many families within each church who are in great need, they live in extremely poor conditions and even do without some of the basic needs. One of the great characteristics about Jesus is His concern for the less fortunate. Throughout His ministry He showed compassion on the people who had needs and in doing so, He was teaching His disciples to do likewise. We need to be a people who show empathy toward others who are less fortunate than we are. I have always believed that one of the greatest tools we have in converting the world to Christ is through our benevolent work and yet we see more arguments among the brethren as to how we use the funds of the church.

CONCLUSION

The work between the church and the home is great. There are many obstacles to overcome in our work, but with prayer and hard work there is not anything we cannot overcome. Let us always remember the work God has set before us is great and we must use all the tools He has given us to do this work. When we use these tools in the manner instructed by God, we can still turn the world upside down!

Chapter 16

Ladies In The Lord's Church

Jinnie Thornton



At some point in time, we have all disappointed our parents, friends, family members or bosses. It's generally not a good feeling and safe to say that we strive not to disappoint those we love and respect. Isaiah 43:7 states, "Even every one that is called by name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." We are created for the glory of God and because we love and respect Him above all others, we should strive to bring glory and honor to Him. And it's not just a man's job to bring glory and honor to God. This job is meant for all Christians. We as women also have jobs that we can do as part of the body of Christ. Genesis 2:18 tells us about how it wasn't good for man to be alone and He created a helpmeet for Adam. Webster's dictionary defines helpmeet/mate has a person who is a companion and helper. As women, we can be helpmeets whether we are married, single, or widowed. We still have a very important job to do. As an easy reminder for myself and for you, I have come up with 4 S's for us to think and act on as women in the Lord's church.

SEEK

The first S that we will discuss is Seek. Matthew 6:33 was one of the first verses that I memorized by heart as a child and it's probably the one that has really stuck with me and it's a very important verse. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all of these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Our lives need to revolve around constantly seeking after God. Seeking to please him, to obey him and to bring honor to him. More importantly than not disappointing our loved ones here on earth is not disappointing the God who created us. He is going to always love us. Parents, who discipline their children, still love their children. God may still be a loving God but that doesn't mean that He will spare us on judgement day if we aren't found faithful. In Exodus, we learn of a new king that was intimidated by how strong and mighty the children of Israel were and wanted to do his best at trying to prevent them from becoming even mightier. He spoke to two midwives by the name of Shiphrah and Puah and told them to kill the sons of the Hebrew women. However, because these two midwives feared God, they didn't adhere to the king's request. We learn that God dealt well with them and he built them houses because of their fear and faithfulness to Him. This reminds me of another verse about obeying God rather than man (Acts 5:29). If we strive to do our best to seek after God, our lives will be much more joyous. It doesn't mean that we won't have hard times, because sin will forever cause trouble. We will discuss a few ways that we can strive to seek after God. One of those ways is to study His Word. If we were to begin to a new job and on our first day, we just sat there and didn't listen to who was training us and didn't bother to learn anything, we probably wouldn't have a second day on the job. In a similar

way, if we chose not to feed our two daughters and let them starve, they wouldn't survive. Their little bodies cannot last without nourishment. Our spiritual bodies can't last without spiritual nourishment. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). Our youngest doesn't like it if it's been past her three hour mark for a bottle; she gets what we would call "hangry." She is hungry and angry. She wants to eat and when she is fed properly, she grows. Spiritually speaking, if we are eating the words of the Bible and feeding our brains by studying, we will grow closer to God and be stronger in His Word. 2 Peter 3 :18 says, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Hhim be glory both now and forever. Amen." We are also to study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Timothy 2:15). I remember brother Keith Mother talking about him being in the military and receiving letters from sister Dorothy. He told us one time that every time he got a letter, he put it on a shelf and never opened it. That sounds like a shocking statement to make, doesn't it? However, he told us that wasn't the truth, and that he opened every letter and read them over and over because he loved the author. He told this to make the point that we should love the author of the Bible enough that we want to read it over and over again to learn more and grow more. We need to study for our benefit so we can learn and grow but we also need to study so that we may teach others. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fea." (1 Peter 3:15). We need to desire to get to heaven and bring others along with us. Another way to seek God is by prayer. If we are seeking a relationship with someone, whether it be in dating or friendship or even a

relationship with family, we don't grow that relationship by never talking to them. If we are seeking a closer relationship to God, we can't expect that relationship to grow if we don't ever talk to Him. He talks to us through His Word and we talk to him through prayer. We are to let our requests be made known unto God but we should do so with gratitude for all that He has done for us (Philippians 4:6-7). Supplication in verse 6 means a plea or specific request. I have a bad habit of thinking that I can handle everything on my own and that my problems are minor in comparison to other people's problems, but God doesn't see that. He sees us individually and knows our own struggles. It's a comfort to think if we ever feel like we have no one to turn to or no one who understands us, God is there and we can always turn to Him. And he wants to hear from us. We don't live close to home anymore and most of the time when I talk to my dad on the phone, I'll ask him what he is doing and he always responds with, "talking to you." My response to that is, "do you not have anything better to do?" He always tells me that no he doesn't. My parents enjoy when I call and talk to them. If I didn't ever call and talk to them, I am sure they would be hurt and disappointed. We are a child of God and He also wants to hear from us. Our prayer life should be constant and not only when we are needing something from Him. If you have ever heard the prayer of a small child, it will humble you and teach you so much. They are full of thanks and the things that they pray for should teach us that we can bring all of our requests to Him.

For this point, the last thing I want to discuss is our worship. This is one of the most important things we can do to seek God. In order to worship, we must first attend services. Hebrews 10:24-25 speaks of not forsaking the assembly and exhorting one another. It's encouraging to see our brothers

and sisters in Christ worshipping God together. In our daily lives, we choose to put so many things over God and it's very easy to come up with excuses for why we can't worship on Sundays and Wednesdays or for our study and prayer life. But what if God gave us excuses for why we couldn't enter into heaven? Why do we try to make up excuses for not assembling with the saints? God knows our hearts, we cannot fool Him. Psalm 122:1 says, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." If I were an emoji, I would be the one with the wide eyes. How many of us are truly glad to go into the assembly? As a mother of young children, Sundays and Wednesdays are difficult for me as I am sure they are for many people whether they have young children or no children at all. I must admit, there are more days than I care to say that I haven't been exactly glad to walk into the assembly. And it has everything to do with where my heart is. More times than not, I have brought this attitude upon myself. I have chosen not to focus on God and seek after Him and I have become selfish. It's hard to admit mistakes but until we come to terms with the truth, we will never grow and learn from the experience. In a reference book that I used, I saw the following quote, "Action motivated from the heart of reverence for the Divine, with the knowledge of who He is and what He has done for us." God deserves our very best and it's been true for me that when we are giving Him our best, our hearts are in a much better place because we have nothing to feel guilty about. It's also encouraging to those around us to see us at worship, it can be a time of exhortation for other members. Some people complain about a crying or babbling baby in the assembly but most of the time you hear positivity about there being a baby because that means the church is growing. When we do worship, we need to make sure

that we are worshipping in spirit and truth and following the pattern of worship that the Bible teaches us. (John 4:23-24).

SERVE

Our second S that we will discuss is Serve. In serving others, we are serving the Lord and humbling ourselves. In my research, I found this quote, “Don’t think less of yourself but think of yourself less.” When we truly have the heart of a servant, we will put ourselves aside and focus on others. I want to add in that sometimes, I feel we can also serve to the detriment of our families or health. Something that I struggle with is if I am feeling overwhelmed, I get stressed and my family is usually the first ones to suffer my stress. The quote says to think of yourself less but it doesn’t say to not think of yourself at all. And part of our servitude is serving our families, so we can use our own discretion but we need to be careful not to make excuses so much that we never serve at all. In the same way, we exhort one another in attending worship, we exhort others by serving them. When Jesus came to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead, Mary and Martha served Jesus in their home. They made Jesus a supper and the Bible says “Martha served.” In the next verse it speaks of Mary taking a pound of expensive ointment and using her hair to wipe it onto Jesus’ feet. Could you imagine using your hair on anyone’s feet? She wasn’t asked to do this, she volunteered to do this for Jesus. We may not wash one another’s feet or rub ointment on someone’s feet with our hair but we do have many ways we can serve during different walks of our life. Sometimes serving others doesn’t mean a physical action, but it can mean giving someone an encouraging word or just a hug. Sometimes one of those can make all the difference in the world to someone who is having a bad day.

And I can almost guarantee that seemingly small act will make an impact for a long time to come. We can take meals or just cookies to someone. It doesn't always have to be someone in need either. We generally take food to those who are sick and shut in and we should continue to do that. But what about helping a mom out or someone you know that has worked long hours and you know that having to go home and cook a meal is a daunting task? Sending a card of encouragement is an easy and excellent way to serve no matter your age. While at Looxahoma, the young adult class individually signed encouraging cards for us and gave them to us. It may have seemed minor to them, but for our family it meant the world and is something that we haven't forgotten. Also, recently during a particularly trying week, I was in a drive thru line waiting to pay when the lady stuck her head out the window and told me that the woman in front of me had bought my food. I was shocked and I cried because it was a random act of kindness that helped lift the spirits of a pretty horrible week. "Be kindly affectionate to one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:10-11). There are other things that we can do to serve. We can make care packages for the homeless and our soldiers or even a college student, be friendly or hold the door open for someone, or include those who may seem to be left out from regular groups. If you are unable to get out and do some things, enlist the help of someone else because it also gives them the opportunity to serve. Serving others doesn't always have to be something big, minor things can matter just as much if not more than the bigger things. And the best way we can serve others and serve our Lord is to share His Word which brings us to our next S.

SHARE

If we never shared the gospel with other people, what would happen to the Lord's church? It would die. Sharing the gospel is a mission work everywhere. It can be in the line at the grocery store or it can be in another country. This is another job that isn't just a man's job. It's just as much our responsibility as it is the men of the church. The Bible speaks very plainly about sharing the gospel in the account of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Sometimes we read too much into sharing the gospel. We do not have to approach people in a manner that is abrasive. We can use our example to help share the gospel. If we truly belong Christ like and choose not to conform to the way of the world, someone will take notice and may eventually ask you why (Romans 12:2). We can also choose to be kind and open to people. A little kindness goes a long way for some people and in being kind and open, it may give you the opportunity to invite them to worship and eventually to study with them. I can't recall all of the details but I remember hearing a story once about a family that was converted and it all started because another family invited them into their home. They showed them some loving hospitality and continued to do so. You never know the impact that you may have on someone and that's why we always need to live our lives in a way that doesn't bring reproach to God and the church.

CONCLUSION

I know this study has been very beneficial to me and I hope that it has for you. I have heard preachers in the pulpit say that they start from behind them and work their way to the front. No one is exempt from sin and there is not one soul that doesn't struggle with something but it is our job as Christians

and as women within the Lord's church to work at living the best godly life that we can by seeking God daily, serving Him by serving others, and sharing the gospel whenever we can. 2 Peter 1:3 says, "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." The Bible is everything we need to be obedient, we just have to choose to make that sacrifice ourselves.

Chapter 17

The Mother's Purse

Ann White



It takes a Mother's love to make a house a home.
A place to be remembered, no matter where we roam...
And her courage and her cheerfulness to make a dark day bright...
It takes a Mother's thoughtfulness to mend the heart's deep "hurts."
And her skill and her endurance to mend little socks and shirts...
It takes a Mother's kindness to forgive us when we err.
To sympathize in trouble and bow her head in prayer...
It takes a Mother's wisdom to recognize our needs
And to give us reassurance by her loving words and deeds...
It takes a Mother's endless faith, her confidence and trust
To guide us through the pitfall of selfishness and lust...
And that is why in all this world there could not be another
Who could fulfill God's purpose as completely as a Mother!

Helen Steiner Rice

God has given us an awesome responsibility when we become Mothers, whether we give birth to them or adopt them. Children are blessings from our heavenly Father. Psalms 127:3 reads: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

There is no greater honor than becoming a godly mother. As mothers, we are the glue that holds the family together. Mothers have great influence upon their children. Who reads to them Bible stories, tucks them in bed at night, and helps them to say their prayers? Usually a mother. We see the power of influence of godly women over and over in the Bible:

- 1 Kings 22: 42-43 Azubah mother of Jehoshaphat, a King who did right in God's eyes.
- 2 Kings 15: 1-3 Jecholiah, mother of King Azariah who did right in the sight of the Lord.
- 2 Timothy 1:5 Eunice mother of Timothy, Paul's son in the gospel.

Our lesson is entitled The Mother's Purse. What do we find in our purses that can remind us to be godly women and bring into the world godly men and women? As women, we find our purses are very essential to our lives. We have a lot of things in our purses that we feel we cannot live without. When you start to clean out your purse, are you not amazed at all the things we collect? Mothers are ready for any emergency they might encounter. Let's look into our purses and see what we can find.

PULL OUT YOUR KEYS

The first item we pull out of our purse is our keys. Some of us may not have the same type keys on our key ring. On mine, you will find a door key to our house, a front door key to my daughter's house and a church building key. But one key we have in common is the key to our car. What does our car key do for us? It takes us from point A to point B. We could say it starts us on a journey; perhaps to the store for groceries, retail stores to buy clothing for

our children, maybe to a friend's house or out to eat. While we are traveling our spiritual journey, what key do we use? What guides us on our journey to Heaven? The Bible. It has all the answers that are needed for us to start our journey to Heaven and to guide us in taking others with us.

Why the Bible? The Bible gives us the answer to that question in 1 Timothy 3:16-17. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." By studying and reading the Bible, we can be secure in the knowledge that God's word has laid out a map for our journey. In Matthew 12:34, we read "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." That's why we meditate on the word and store it in our hearts, so that it can flow from our mouth when we need it. The Bible is God's word. The Bible lets us see into the mind of God and allows us to understand God's will in our lives.

The Bible is not a buffet. We have a wonderful buffet restaurant in Martin. You can go to the counter and your mind becomes boggled at all the choices you have. You get to pick what you like and what you don't like, according to your taste. The Bible is not like that. We live by every word. Jesus said to Satan in Matthew 4:4: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God does not allow us to pick and choose what is convenient for us." By picking up His word, we are searching for TRUTH. When you know God's word, it will become easier to face the temptations that Satan challenges you with. How wonderful it would be to know God's word so well that you could do as Jesus did in Matthew 4:4 and say to Satan "it is written".

Challenge your mind to dig deep into God's word.

Actively search for truth. Learn of God's plan for you. Act on that plan. Becky Blackmon, in her book "A Pearle Seeker" writes "it is up to us to learn, grow, change and be saved. Trust me in this one thought Satan will work overtime to keep you out of God's word!" She goes on to write "the devil's most powerful weapon is man's ignorance of God's word!". Oh, how true her statement is! Don't let Satan win! Be strong! The Lord will help you. He is bigger than Satan!

Let's get excited about Christianity! Learn more about it! The more we know, the more amazed we become. Let's get passionate about teaching God's word to our children. We can do many things for our children. We can provide them a loving home, food and clothing, but what good are the physical needs without the spiritual needs of our children? Deuteronomy 6:7 teaches us to teach our children God's word. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." The word of God surrounded the Jewish children.

We teach God's word to our children in two ways: by words and by actions. Christa Bryant has written a book called "The Treasured Woman." In it she writes "We must draw close to the Lord and make sure our children know we belong to Him. Our children need to see us studying God's word. They need to see us reach out to those who do not have Christ in their life and help them discover the blessings of Christianity. Our children need to see us desiring to be at worship and kneeling in prayer. Our children need to see us so in love with the Father that we depend on Him for every need, rely on His wisdom and shape our lives around His commands. The greatest way to convince our children of the love of God is not in some program or curriculum; the greatest

way to convince our children is to be convinced ourselves. We are the greatest object lesson of living a life pleasing to the Lord” (The Treasured Woman by Christa Bryant pg. 41).

“Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God may not be something you do but someone you raise.” Facebook, One Million Moms.

PULL OUT THE SANITIZER

The next object I’ll pull out of my purse is a bottle of sanitizer. Sanitizer is used to clean up a child when needed. You know that a child can become dirty quickly. Sanitizer is something that is needed to quickly wipe the chocolate from their face or wipe the germs from their hands before eating. We also like to use sanitizer to free the cart at Wal-Mart of germs or the public highchair or chair in the restaurant. Sanitizing can become valuable in our spiritual lives too. As a parent it is our responsibility to be watchful of our children. We are to train them. We provide them the tools by which they can decide whether or not to become Christians. It is up to us to guide and it is up to them to listen. There is no perfect formula to rearing our children. As parent, we aren’t perfect. All God expects from us is to do the best we can. We will make mistakes, but we can learn from them. We read in Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” “As mothers, you and I have countless, daily opportunities in our homes to plant God’s word deeply in the minds and souls of our children. We just need to take advantage of those opportunities”. (A Woman after God’s Own Heart - Elizabeth George pg. 124).

We need to teach our children that God is our number one priority in our daily lives. Are we teaching that when we allow sports to take the place of worship to God? Wes

McAdams wrote an article entitled "Are We Raising Athletes or Christians?" This article caught my eye, as I see it being played out in every congregation. In the article he talks about how his son loves to play baseball. He writes that his son loves the Texas Rangers; he watches them on TV or he may lay in bed at night listening to them on the radio. His son can sit for hours and talk baseball. It is his passion. In this article, he strongly believes Christian families need to exercise caution when their children have athletic talent and passion. He writes "I don't want my son to idolize baseball. I don't want him to think baseball makes life worth living. I don't want him to believe he can't be whole without baseball. I want him to know baseball could disappear overnight and everything would be just fine. Don't get me wrong. I want him to play baseball and enjoy it as long as he wants to; but at the end of the day, I want him to remember that it is a game...not a god."

Also Wes writes "every Christian family must decide how they will go about making sure sports never become idols in their homes. Children instinctively understand what is most important in your home. They pick up on the verbal and non-verbal clues about what takes precedence. They can tell if games and practices are more important to us than worship, Bible study, evangelism, and service to others. We all must make sure that in our own hearts, and in the hearts of our children, some mascot does not sit on the throne where Christ should be seated. We must not allow sports to rule over our lives, dictating our schedules and determining our emotional state. We are going to have to turn off some games and verbally declare, "Sports are not an ultimate thing in our home." Ask yourself, am I raising an athlete or a Christian?

Where do we turn to for guidance as we give instructions to help our children in a world full of sin? "My help cometh

from the Lord, which made heaven and earth” (Psalms. 121:2).

Jesus told his followers, in Matthew 10:37-39:

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

Can a godly mother or grandmother have influence on children in her home? Yes, she can! The Bible uses an example of a godly mother and grandmother’s influence in 2 Tim. 1:5. “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” The apostle Paul wrote these words in a letter to Timothy. Who was Timothy? He was Paul’s “dearly beloved son” in the faith. He was a gospel preacher, a fellow worker with Paul. The apostle Paul relied heavily on this young man who received his precious faith from his mother and grandmother. Can you imagine the joy that entered into Eunice’s and Lois’s hearts when they read what Paul had written about them? What is this unfeigned faith that was found in Lois, Eunice and later in Timothy? In the NKJV “genuine” is used instead of “unfeigned”. The words mean the same. Unfeigned or genuine faith means our faith is not hypocrisy. Eunice and Lois had an active faith. Each lived her faith daily. Children are constantly watching those around them. As Timothy observed his mother and grandmother, he saw how important their faith was to them.

Timothy was a great example of Proverbs 22:6, Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. If you are parents who did your best to train your children to follow the Lord but they chose not to, this verse can send you on a guilt trip. What does it mean to train? It means to teach someone a skill or type of behavior. Training is the process of being conditioned or taught to do something or it is the process of learning. In our definition of train, two people are involved the trainer and the trainee. I have a dog named Charlie B. When he was a puppy, I needed to train him to go outside to do his business. I read all the right books, we would go out frequently, he would receive praise for his actions outside, but why was he still pooping inside the house? Is it because I am not doing anything? No, it is because he is unwilling to take to his training. Sometimes, that is the way it is with our children. We provide them with opportunities to go to youth rallies and to go to Christian camps. They attend gospel meetings and VBS. We encourage them to teach in Bible class with qualified teachers. We diligently teach them the word of God, we encourage them to choose the right friends and we present them a godly example. But when they choose not to follow Christ, we agonize over what we did wrong. As a parent, we look at ourselves and wonder how we could have failed. It is heartbreaking. We become consumed with guilt, some will ruin their health. Could it be our children did not heed to the training we provided for them?

There is no better parent than God. But God still suffered the pain and heartache of seeing His children walk away from His teaching time and time again. In Genesis, we read of God walking in the garden with Adam and Eve. We read of the blessings He bestowed on them but what did they do? They listened to Satan and turned away from God. Can we

not imagine the pain of their betrayal? Can you not imagine the heartache of having to push your children out of a place of peace and perfectness you created for them into a world of sin? In Jeremiah 32:33, we find God rebuking his children the Israelites. “And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.” Isaiah 1:2 reads, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” God reminded them that He had taught them, He had nourished them but they rebelled against His teaching. In Luke 15, we have the story of the prodigal son. The father let him go out into the world with his inheritance. The younger son turned away from the teachings of his father, he lived a sinful life, he ruins his name and eventually he dined with the pigs. Notice Luke 15:20: “he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” Do you suppose his earlier teaching had something to do with his decision to return home? Adam and Eve, the children of Israel and the prodigal son were taught right but chose to go wrong.

Remember, you are not responsible for the decisions that your children make. You are responsible to give them the tools to make responsible decisions. You are responsible to give them a clear understanding of the options that are open to them. You are responsible to make absolutely certain that they have a clear-cut understanding of what Christianity is all about. When all of this is done, they are responsible for the decisions they make.

PULL OUT YOUR ID

The next object I have in my purse is my ID. We use our ID often. An ID is used to give recognition to who we

are. As Christian mothers we need to present our ID to our children and those around us. That means others need to recognize us as Christians, especially our children. We need to set an example of who we are. We are children of God. We teach the importance of the word of God to our children. Our children are constantly watching us. Do they see us reading and studying God's word? Do they hear us praying to God for guidance? Do they hear us thanking Him for the many blessings He has bestowed upon us? Our children should see that God is important to us and He is first in our lives. In Marge Green book *Martha, Martha* pg 28 she writes, "We spend time on many things but how much time do we give to teaching our children about God in our homes? Even the smallest child learns much about God in everyday things. The flower growing in the window box – did it not come from God? The food on the table - did not God provide this for us? The sun, the rain, our home, our loved ones – all are an excellent source of teaching the little ones of God."

To be recognized as a Christian, my children must see me in prayer. They need to know that I pray daily for them. The following popped up on my Facebook page recently:

7 Prayers to Pray for Your Kid

1. That they would choose to follow Jesus
2. That they would marry a godly spouse.
3. That their thoughts would be pure.
4. That they would choose friends wisely.
5. That they would have the courage to do what's right.
6. That they would learn to manage money well.
7. That they would make a difference in this world.

(One Million Moms)

Prayer offers a chance for us to be renewed day by day. Charles Jefferson said, “Nobody knows what takes place when we drop a lump of sugar into a cup of coffee. Whether the change is mechanical or chemical, the wisest men cannot say. For most of us, it is enough to know that the coffee is sweetened. So, we know that by dropping a prayer into a day we sweeten its hours.” Just as a cup of coffee in the morning can revive some of us, prayer revives the Christian life. We all have our crosses and Christians long for a refuge in time of storm. David knew and trusted God to hear him when he called. In Psalm 4:3, he reminds us when he writes, “But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The Lord will hear when I call to Him.” Psalm 116:1&2: “I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. 2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.” When we love someone, we want to talk to them daily. Although it has been 52 years ago, I remember, when dating Sidney, we were constantly talking to one another. We were interested in sharing our feelings, our needs and our thoughts. God is interested in you seeking Him through prayer. The blessings of prayer await us, it is the blessing of communing with God! So many blessings are contained within prayer...blessing of talking to God before we make decisions, the blessings of loving and caring for others enough to ask God to help them. Adding prayer into our daily lives helps to build a Christ-like character. Be a faithful Christian. Be Christ-like. Let your children see you as being faithful in prayer. Another way I present my ID as a Christian to my children is in being faithful to my Father. In 1 Samuel 1, we find an example of faithfulness in Hannah. She was courageous and she had a strong determination as she faced trials in her life. She was

a wife who wanted to become a mother but had been denied that blessing. She longed for a child. Hannah was married to Elkanah who had a wife named Peninnah. Peninnah had been blessed with children. She was constantly provoking Hannah to such a point that Hannah would dissolve into tears. Hannah believed in the power of prayer. She did not give up on becoming a mother as she prayed to God. In verse 11, she prayed a special prayer begging God to give her a son. She promised that if He would bless her, she would return him to God. Later, Hannah was blessed with a son she called him Samuel. Imagine her joy when she held him in her arms for the first time! Samuel stayed with Hannah until he was old enough to be weaned. At that point, Hannah remembered her promise to God. Samuel was return to the temple to the care of Eli. His mother was an example to him. She remembered her vow to God and she was faithful to carry it out.

CONCLUSION

The next time you open your purse to take out your keys, your sanitizer or your ID be reminded of your influence in your children's lives. Encourage them to study God's word, to make God their number ONE priority and to live faithfully in accordance to His will. Encourage your children to dare to be different.