

Scripture Speaks To The Family

The Teacher As Minister To Children And Parents

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This workshop, “The Teacher as Minister to Children and Family,” finds us in the last month of a presidential election year. Next month United States citizens will go to the polls to elect the forty-first president of the United States. Just 28 years ago John F. Kennedy won the highest office in the land with the promise of a “New Frontier.” In his inaugural address he challenged “a new generation” of Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Citizens, for the most part, rallied around the young president’s challenge.

However, our workshop today concerns itself with an even nobler theme, the Christian family and the Christian church. A challenge seems to be in order. “Ask not what your church can do for the family—ask what the family can do for the church.” This does seem to be a common perception. It is the idea behind most stewardship and outreach programs. It is a valid challenge within any Christian congregation in the interest of responsible stewardship and mission emphasis. But it is not the whole picture. Yes, the Christian family lives to serve the church, but at the same time the church wants to stand ready to assist the Christian family. It needs to stand ready to do all it can for the Christian family in today’s world. That the church might assist the family to be everything God intends it to be, that this workshop might carefully consider the role of the Christian school and its called teachers in this noble endeavor, we begin this second session today by letting the Scripture speak. SCRIPTURE SPEAKS TO THE FAMILY I) of God’s Order and II) of God’s Purpose.

I. OF GOD’S ORDER

When we speak of family we speak of that which is dear to all of us. Family is common to us all. Most of us left family to come here today. Most of us will eagerly return to family when we leave tomorrow. All of us have memories of family. Most of the memories, we trust, are fond ones. We do not exist outside of family. Family is our origin. Family describes us. Family is part of us, past, present, and future.

Family is important to us all. It comes as no surprise that family is prominent on the pages of Scripture. Though Scripture may not speak specifically of family in many places it has much to say for the benefit of the family. Each book of the Bible involves family matters and family situations.¹ God’s redemptive work involved the family. By a miraculous conception and virgin birth God’s eternal Son became a member of a family. He was directly involved in family life for thirty years. His three-year ministry took place among families. His first miracle was performed at a wedding, the establishment of a new family. He responded to the plea of a father for his sick son, a mother for her daughter who was demon-possessed. The three resurrection miracles restored a loved one to his or her family. At his own death Jesus remained loyal to his family as he committed his mother to the care of John.

Family is important. Family is prominent among us and in the Scriptures. Family is a favorite study of leading anthropologists and sociologists. However, most of them ignore a vital truth. They labor under the assumption that the family order is subject to constant change. They rejoice that the order in the family has escaped from what they call the patriarchal family of the Old Testament times in which the husband and father was the undisputed head. They heavily favor what they refer to as a more democratic type of family or the nuclear family.² While they do not see the female-dominated family as any improvement they believe that in the family of the future there is no headship as such, and the children will have a greater part in family decisions.

Contrary to modern thought family is God’s own institution. God established the home and the family when he ordained the holy estate of marriage. Any study of family must include, if not begin with, the sixth day of creation. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he

created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Ge 1:27-28a). God made man holy, sinless. God made the sexes, male and female. God commanded man and woman to be fruitful, increase, multiply. He empowers and blesses human propagation. Genesis two, especially the account of the creation of the woman, describes the close relationship of the marriage bond. “The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.... So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man: The man said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’, for she was taken out of man” (Ge 2:18, 21,23). The account of creation and marriage concludes: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Ge 2:24-25).

Adam acknowledged what God had done. God made for him a helper, just the right kind of helper, the helper he needed, the helper he desired. Furthermore, what God had done for him he did for all mankind. The woman (of man) God made from the man represented all womankind. In quoting verse 24 Jesus himself acknowledged that God created the sexes, man and woman, for marriage (one flesh) and for family.³ Just as marriage is not man’s idea, part of his social development, but God’s own institution from the beginning, so also the family. Anyone today who has a vital interest in the welfare of the family will listen carefully to what God says to the family as a unit as well as to the individual members of the family.

Scripture speaks to husbands (and to fathers). It speaks directly when it says: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph 5:25-28). The verses leading up to these add much. The chapter begins, “Be imitators of God...” Midway through the chapter the inspired apostle urges, “Be very careful, then, how you live....” He has not spoken directly to the family but everything he says has its first application in the family. In verse 22 he gets directly to the family: “Wives submit.” When he gets to the husband he says, “love.”

A major responsibility for the welfare and happiness of the Christian family rests with the husband. If the church expects women to accept and find joy in their God-appointed role, it is necessary that men be what God intended them to be. This begins in the home. God created man to be the head of the family. He created man first (1 Ti 2:13) and he created the woman for the man (1 Co 11:8-9). As the head of the family man can perform no greater duty and render any higher service to his family than to love his wife as himself. She is his God-given helper. She has become with him one flesh.

We look to Scripture for a specific example of such love. Why not cite the life of Abraham as an example of the family and a husband’s love? Granted, the mention is never detailed or specific. But consider the concern Abraham showed for Sarah in resolving the matter with Hagar and Ishmael. Though Abraham later found it difficult to send Ishmael away (Ge 21) he did not lack consideration for Sarah (Ge 16). Much can be learned of a person’s true feelings at the time of a death. Scripture specifically mentions Abraham’s mourning and weeping over Sarah’s death. An entire chapter (Ge 23) is devoted to the purchasing of a plot to bury Sarah. Luther finds no lack of love and concern by Abraham for his wife in the Genesis 12:10-20 incident in Egypt when Abraham presented Sarah to Pharaoh as his sister.⁴ Now where do we find a hint of resentment or complaint by Abraham because of Sarah’s barrenness. Granted, it is an argument from silence. But we cannot quickly dismiss Abraham’s longing and waiting for an heir as fulfillment of God’s own promise. Perhaps the best commentary of Abraham’s love for Sarah may be found in Sarah’s own response. At the birth of Isaac she rejoiced that she had been able to give her husband a son (Ge 21:7). Centuries later the inspired apostle holds up Sarah as an example of obedience to her husband. Sarah “called him her master” (1 Pe 3:6).

Whatever Sarah’s obedience says of her husband’s love for her, it is an example of what Scripture says to wives. “Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the

head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:22-24). Again the word of the Lord is clear. Wives, submit to your husbands. The man is the head of the woman and the husband is the head of the wife. The apostle explains the reason in 1 Corinthians 2 and 1 Timothy 2 when he takes his readers back to the beginning, to the creation. Man was made first and the woman was made from the man and for the man. There is nothing here of inferiority. Woman is not inferior. Neither is she identical. She is man’s helper, a fitting compliment. Therefore, in the marriage and in the home the wife is to submit to her husband in everything as her God-given head.

Again, this is not inferiority. As the mother in the home and the bearer of the children she enjoys a high and noble station. Who is to say that the influence Sarah had on Isaac was less than that which Abraham had upon his son. The first chapter of 1 Samuel reveals Hannah’s great dedication to her son Samuel. Until Samuel was weaned Hannah stayed home with her son when her husband went up to the tabernacle to offer the annual sacrifice (v. 21). And when Samuel was weaned it was Hannah who took him up to the house of the Lord at Shiloh (v. 24) and gave him to the Lord (v. 28). The apostle Paul underscores the influence of Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, when he recalls the sincere faith of his young coworker in the gospel. One expects that there was a mother’s care, love, and influence behind every hero of faith mentioned in the Scripture (Hebrews 11).

The husband’s love for his wife is so crucial for the happiness of the marriage and the home. No less crucial is the wife’s willingness, not only to recognize, but also to find joy and happiness in the role God has given to her. Scripture has nothing but praise for the wife who uses her special talents and abilities in the role he has assigned to her (Pr 31:10-31).

God’s order for husbands and wives becomes even more important when God blesses the marriage with children. God said to the man and woman: “Be fruitful and multiply.” Children remain God’s greatest blessing upon the marriage. “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (Ps 127:3-5). God’s gift of children brings joy and fulfillment in the Christian marriage. It also brings greater responsibilities. The responsibilities include the child’s physical, social and mental well being. But first of all are the spiritual concerns and responsibilities. “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). The Book of Proverbs, especially the first seven chapters, is replete with reminders of the training and instructions of a child that God requires of parents.

From the beginning the birth of a child was vitally important because of the close relationship of family and children to God’s plan of salvation. The offspring of a woman would crush the head of Satan. This explains both the great happiness of believers of old and their sense of increased responsibility at the birth of a child. Abraham and Sarah took special joy in the birth of Isaac and showed parental concern and responsibility in the choice of a wife for Isaac and the establishment of his home and family. Isaac and Rebekah rejoiced in the birth of twin sons, expressed concern for Jacob at his choosing of a wife and grieved over the heathen wives Esau chose for himself. In the days following the exodus from Egypt and the establishment of the Sinaitic Covenant the religious instruction of the children was tied closely to the covenant (Dt 6 and 7). Deuteronomy 6 begins, “These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.” The fulfillment of God’s promise, the birth of the son of the ages, did not make the birth of a child of little importance after that. Jesus underscores the responsibility of child-bearing when he defended the mothers who brought their children to be blessed by him: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mk 10:14).

If Scripture speaks earnestly to parents in the family, it speaks forcefully to the children. The Fourth Commandment states it rather mildly but firmly and positively when it says, “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Ex 20:12). Scripture becomes more forceful when it warns: “Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother: (Dt 27:16). “The eye that

mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures” (Pr 30:17). Examples of God-fearing children in the Scriptures are worth repeating: Isaac’s obedience to his father in Egypt, the dedication of Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi, the obedience and service of Samuel in the temple as fulfillment of a mother’s vow, the child Jesus in the temple.

Husband, wife, parents, children—when Scripture speaks to family it speaks of God’s own institution. The marriage is his; the home is his; the children are his; the parents are his representatives. When we discuss home and family we are addressing ourselves to that which is dear to God. He established it. We must concern ourselves because of what sin has done to God’s marriage, God’s homes, and God’s families. In the fall into sin the first parents despised God’s order in the home, church and society. The woman sinned when she stepped outside her God-appointed role. She took the initiative when Satan came to tempt, “Did God really say....” (Ge 3:1). She listened to the voice of Satan. She ate what God had forbidden. She gave to her husband. Adam was no less guilty. God addressed Adam first after the fall (Ge 3:9-11). Romans chapter five places the responsibility squarely upon Adam when it says; “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin...” (v. 12). Adam listened to the voice of his wife and ate the fruit.

The perfect mutual joy and happiness of that first marriage was gone. The first marriage was no longer without sin. Every other marriage has been affected by sin. Ever since, the woman’s submission has easily become resentment. The man’s rule has often become harsh and domineering. Marriage, even at its best, is never what God intended it to be.

Nor is the home. Scripture speaks to the family with repeated admonitions when it cites the sins of parents and/or the children in respect to their appointed roles. Can we imagine the grief of the first family when Cain killed Abel, rejected God’s warning and went out from the presence of the Lord? We are told specifically of the grief of Isaac and Rebekah over Esau’s misplaced priorities. In Eli’s home there was fault enough to go around, Eli’s sons for their disobedience and Eli’s failure to take sufficient means to discipline his sons. Father and sons met a sudden death. David’s royal house, not without marital love and happiness, knew sorrow and pains because of the sins of parents and children.

God’s marriage, God’s home, God’s children. And God is a God of order. That order we have briefly reviewed.... It is neatly summed up in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” 3:18-21.

God’s order is special. It is moral in nature. It is not a matter of choice. It is as obligatory as the Ten Commandments. Husbands cannot choose if or how much to love their wives. Wives do not choose for themselves whether or not to submit to their husbands. Parents have no choice. God holds them responsible for their children. Children do not get to choose whether they will obey their parents anymore than they get to choose who their parents will be.

God’s order is durable in time. We have not mentioned examples of polygamy, of eunuchs, of concubines, of adultery and fornication, of divorce. Add to these warnings against abortions and sexual sins, all of which undermine and destroy the family. Man dare not “disorder” what God has established. Though man has tried in many ways to undermine what God has ordered God has preserved and continues to bless what he has established.

And God’s order is definitely for the welfare of man. Since the remainder of this essay will elaborate on this very thought in one way or another, my observations here will be general and brief. God’s people have realized great blessings when they have observed God’s order for his people. Individuals have been blessed. The patriarchs held a high view of God’s order. Who can fail to recognize that they and their families were greatly rewarded by a gracious God. Nations have been blessed. Consider Israel’s earlier history. In Egypt one family grew into a great number, 600,000 (Nu 2:31), not counting women and children. In Canaan they became a great nation. Though one does not have a chronological account of the people’s view of God’s order for marriage, home and family, one learns much from the fact that Israel’s downfall as a nation was accompanied by

intermarriage with the surrounding heathen nations and adopting their practices and customs. And society has been blessed when God's order has been honored and obeyed. Family is essential for society. It is the very foundation upon which society has been built. When the family fails, when homes break up, when people no longer observe God's order for family, individuals are the first to suffer. The terrible cost to society quickly follows.

To conclude our thoughts in this first part of the essay, "God Speaks to the Family," we return to God's plan of salvation. The fact that God's plan was closely tied to marriage and the family bears repeating in our discussion of God's order. Before the fall marriage was prominent in God's plan for man in his world. Ever since Ge 3:15 the importance of family loomed larger. Every marriage, the birth of every child and every family took on greater meaning. By the offspring of a woman Satan's infernal power would be crushed. "When the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4) God kept that promise—in the family. God's eternal son became incarnate. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary. Only after the angel assured Joseph that "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20) did Joseph dismiss the thought of divorcing Mary quietly. As a result God's Son was born into a legal marriage and family. Within the family he "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk 2:52). Within the family he lived a perfect life as the sinner's substitute. With his mother looking on he died on the cross to free man from the curse of sin, also from the sins committed against spouse, sins committed against parents and sins committed against children, the sins within marriage, home and family, God's established order.

II. Of God's Purpose

The family is God's, his institution. God has established order for the individual members of the family, the relationship of spouses, of parents, and of children. This order does not change. It is always the same. It does not change because God's purpose for the family does not change. Many things within the structure of the family change. The size of the family may change. The ages of the family members change. There is change when a member is handicapped, becomes disabled, or is removed through death. However, God's purpose, like God's order, does not change.

God's purpose, we said, is to bless. In order to bestow his blessings God instituted the family as well as the church and state. He has placed his representatives in these three vital areas of human life in order to bestow blessings upon the lives of his creatures and pass these blessings from one generation to the next. Of the three, family and church are more closely tied together and bear the greater responsibility and potential. The family that is the strength of society is also the strength of the church. State and family share the concern of bestowing temporal blessings. Family and church share the greater spiritual concerns. Of the three, the family carries the potential for the greatest influence, good or bad.

The family provides the earliest opportunity for a child to grow and develop, physically, mentally and socially. Here are the very first opportunities to instill those spiritual values and virtues that will best equip the child for the rest of his or her life. It is also the family that has the most frequent, daily, influence upon the tender and impressionable lives.

Without a doubt the earliest years in the family are important if God's purpose for the child's life is to be realized and if he is to grow up with the examples, images, and ideals which will in turn enable him or her to establish a strong marriage, home and family life in years to come. "Train up a child in the way he is to go..." (Pr 22:6). But nowhere does Scripture give us a step-by-step, do-it-just-like-this, manual for child development. We do not have the benefit of a home video to follow the life of any child, not even the childhood of that perfect child, Jesus. For the most part we have only an occasional snapshot along the way. But Scripture certainly does give us examples of the end product that God desires from the homes of Christian parents.

Take for example a Moses. We do not know the training in his home during those precious early years before he was taken into the palace of Pharaoh. We have little background of the home except the names of his parents, the fact that he had a sister and brother and that his parents trusted in the Lord during those difficult days in the land of Egypt. About the same can be said of an Isaac, a Joseph, Moses, Samuel, James and John, or

Timothy, to name a few. We do not know of their growth and development in the home during those precious years of rapid physical, mental and social development. We cannot watch the development of personality, affections and social skills. We don't have any real insight into their relationships inside and outside the family. We don't see the self-esteem, sense of belonging, and the need to love and to be loved. The only thing we can be certain of is their early introduction into the kingdom of God. We can safely conclude that each, except for Timothy, was circumcised according to God's law and became a child of God on the 8th day after birth. Beyond that we have at most an occasional snapshot along the way: of a Moses who was nurtured by his own mother until he was taken to the palace of Pharaoh, of Samuel who was entrusted to the service of Eli, and again when the Lord called him in the night, of a Timothy who learned of his Savior at the knee of his mother and grandmother. Of the remaining we get no glimpse until they were well beyond the age of infancy or early childhood. But in an indirect way we learn much of the homes and of the parents of these heroes of faith. In them we find the values and virtues that God seeks in the hearts of men, values and virtues which, unless they are part of the early training of a child, are seldom learned. No single complete list of such virtues can be found in Scripture. But partial lists are common (Ga 5:22-23, Eph 4:32, Col 3:12-14, 1 Pe 4:7-10, 11 Pe 1:5-7). A long list may be produced from the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs: love, trust, patience, peace, kindness, goodness, discipline, responsibility, humility, honesty, faithfulness, harmony, contentment, dedication, service, etc.

No matter whose list of values and virtues based on the Scripture one is minded to use, the lives of God's heroes of faith in both the Old and New Testaments reflect them in many ways. It may happen as the result of an incident recorded in Scripture that one or the other gifts stands out in our memories, the patience of a Job, the trust of an Isaac, the self-discipline and the forgiving heart of a Joseph, the leadership of a Moses, the dedication of a Samuel, the perseverance of a David, the courage of an Elijah, the service of a Daniel, the self-sacrifice of a James and John, the loyalty of a Timothy. All of these are virtues that need to be taught, to be learned. The first and great opportunity to learn them and to practice and develop them is in the intimacy of the home and family. The church may ably assist the family in God's purpose for the family. But when all is said and done the church cannot take the place of the home. Oftener than not the lack of influence or the negative influence of the family will render the church's influence negligible.

Children are to be taught formally and informally by word and by example. Can't it be said, must it not be said, that in respect to all such values and virtues actions speak louder than words? Where but in the home are the actions and reactions, expressions and comments, moods and movements of a person, that is a father or mother, observed more carefully and imitated more closely than in the home? What powerful lessons were taught, sermons preached, values expressed by the sacrifice of an Abraham, brotherly kindness of a Joseph, vow of a Hannah, prayer life of a Daniel, and worshipful dancing of a David. In every instance we can be sure that we see evidence of God's purpose for the Christian home and family, evidence of either training received or training being given in a home where God dwells.

In speaking of God's purpose I have been addressing myself specifically to the Christian family. However, not everything I have said under God's purpose is limited to the Christian family. Other homes and families promote growth and development, physical, social and mental. Non-Christian homes can impart morals and values. Non-Christian parents are able to be good parents, good spouses, in respect to God's order. They are able to rear children to be responsible individuals, exemplary citizens, morally straight outwardly speaking. They are able to teach kindness, patience, thoughtfulness, and willingness to forgive others.

This is as it should be. Marriage, family and children are God's arrangement for all men for all time. All parents are God's representatives of what Luther called God's other kingdom. They function as God's agents for the benefit of society insofar as they observe the order, which God has established for them.

However, the growth and development, the values and virtues which Non-Christian homes provide have a different source, different motivation and different end. Non-Christian parents function as God's representatives in the home on the basis of human reason that includes the inscribed law, conscience and also the natural knowledge of God. The goals and aims in such nurturing are only for this life. The motivation is a combination of fear, pride and hope of reward. Such homes are able to instill a measure of outward good and

civic righteousness. But motivation and goals tend to be humanistic, materialistic and self-serving. They serve a purpose in God's plan for this temporal world. They have no lasting, eternal value or benefit. They serve man, not God.

Non-Christian homes are merely the workshops of men. The Christian home, however, is a workshop of the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own." (1 Co 6:19). Of the Christian marriage, home and family we are able to say in the fullest sense; God's marriage, God's home, God's family. Whereas all parents are God's representatives and perform a service in the interest of the other kingdom, only Christian parents are members of God's real kingdom and function as members of that kingdom. They are all priests in God's spiritual kingdom. Scripture also speaks of parents when it says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9). As members of God's kingdom of grace, they, through marriage, established a Christian home. Their homes are not mere feeding stations, disciplinary cells, and counseling sessions as necessary. They are nurseries of Christian knowledge and Christian virtues. They exist for the noble purpose that all members of the family might know God and live to declare his praises.

Christian parents are ministers of God's holy word, of law and gospel. They are called to practice daily what Walther has called the most difficult and highest act of the Christian.⁵ Daily they must apply the law to the lives of the children. First are God's holy commandments. They are not only to be taught, memorized. They are to be used and applied daily. Socialists and psychologists will say that doing so stifles mental and social growth and development, warps the personality, and creates a poor self-image. The law alone of course can very well do that. The law is never meant to exist by itself. By itself it can only lead to despair. But without law children will see themselves only in comparison to each other, their parents, their peers and mankind in general. This leads to other evils: sinful pride, a false sense of security, spiritual indifference and neglect, even contempt for God.

Also there are the rules established by the parents for good order in the home. A home without rules spells chaos. Children raised without discipline are soon thoroughly spoiled. "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Pr 13:24). Not that Christian parents are perfect. They also sin, daily. They will be guilty of sin against each other. They will also be guilty of sinning against their children. Their own children may, by word or deed, give an indictment of their sins. But none of this must keep parents from using the law to show their children their sins, to warn them against evil and to correct them when they have done wrong.

And they will use the gospel. Especially they will proclaim the good news of a merciful, gracious God in Christ. Proclaiming the law to show sin is only preparatory. It makes hearts contrite. It prepares the way for the gospel. The gospel makes parenting the high calling that it is. God does not empower and bless the propogations of mankind as an end in itself, or that man may live to himself. God seeks the salvation of sinners. God wants every newborn child to come to know him and enjoy fellowship with him now and forever. The Christian parent has that ultimate opportunity right within the home. It involves his or her own flesh and blood, the lives God privileged them to bring into this world. In light of the gospel it is difficult, impossible, to understand that any Christian husband or wife does not look forward to, welcome, and enjoy thoroughly the family which God may give. What can give greater joy, meaning, purpose and fulfillment in life than sharing the gospel, beginning with one's own children?

We live in a world so preoccupied with things, doing things, having things, more things, everything, the more things the better. It imagines that things will give them joy, fulfillment and satisfaction. Scripture does not equate happiness with things. What does Solomon say? "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread" (Pr 30:8). Paul agrees. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Ti 6:6). But Scripture does equate happiness, real and lasting happiness, with the gospel. That includes the gospel spoken in the home, ministered by God's priests (parents) to their children. Their children reborn by the Spirit are the only "things" which they will be able to have with themselves in heaven.

It is the gospel that makes the Christian home and family distinctively different. The Christian home is a nursery. Jesus' lambs are fed daily with the milk of the Word. Jesus said; "Feed my lambs" (Jn 21:15). The Christian home is a school. Jesus' little ones are taught the simple truths of God's holy word. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). The Christian home is a church where worshiping the Savior is the best part of each day. "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:28). The Christian home is a workshop where Christ also lives. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10).

In the family God's priest are able to minister at work and at play. They minister in both a formal and informal manner. Neither is to be slighted or neglected. The benefit of all formal training is obvious. The informal opportunities may be even more effective as parents live their faith, answer the eager questions and dispel the momentary fears of young hearts and minds, and reflect on God's activity and goodness in everyday things.

Who will deny the blessings of God upon the Christian home where the gospel lives and rules? There Christian parents use the gospel in all of its sweetness to heal the wounds which the law has inflicted by pronouncing God's own forgiveness on contrite hearts. There the gospel is used to motivate in order that children may grow in a life of sanctification. There all Christian values and virtues are applied to everyday life. There members of the family live a life of willing service to God. There is a life of meaning and purpose that reaches its ultimate fruition in heaven.

Who will be able to measure God's blessing upon home, church and society when God's order and God's purpose are acknowledged and applied in Christian homes? May the church stand ready to counsel and encourage Christian parents in their high calling as priest in God's homes.

ENDNOTES

1. F. Deen, Family Living in the Bible, Preface XII.
2. O. Feucht, Family Relationships and the Church, p. 175.
3. Prof. Carl Lawrenz, Selections from a Genesis Commentary, *WLQ*, October 1981.
4. Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 2, p. 291ff
5. Walther, Law and Gospel, Thesis III

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