

# CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CHRISTIAN HOME

Psalm 128; Matthew 18:1-6; Colossians 3:12-17

**Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it** (Psalm 127:1).

A house is not necessarily a home, and a home is more than a house. We tend to confuse the two today. A house may be a building for any purpose: for business, entertainment, worship, lodging or living. A house in which a family lives is called a home. Homes do not just happen, for given a house a home must still be built. Home is not so much an outward thing to be built, as an inward thing to be created. This is a major undertaking and not understood by all parents today.

There are few things which interest us, as Christian women, more keenly than our homes and families.

To succeed in family life is our absorbing goal. A father is the householder, but a mother is the homemaker, with the chief task of making a house a home. Hers is the challenge to make home a retreat from the sapping struggle of the workaday world, the place of rest and renewal of body and spirit, a place where all are loved and feel secure, where faith and trust are the atmosphere, and happiness, sadness, cares and achievements are shared.

We are being made increasingly aware, also, that success in vocation, in social and civic spheres, in Christian family living in every way of life depends, in no small way, on how well we fill our places as homemakers and Christian parents.

God made the family to be the basic unit of life (Genesis 1:27, 28) and, in every known culture since that day, the family has remained the foundation and axis of society.

The purpose of the family, to use a definition of the sociologist, is to perpetuate the human race, to provide for physical and emotional needs, to transmit culture from one generation to another through the nurture of its children, and to contribute religious, social, economic and aesthetic values to humanity. Does the modern sociologist know how closely he aligns with God's purpose for the family which is found in Genesis one?

All of life owes a great debt to the home. Every good activity and institution was born within its walls. From earliest days the home was the center of worship; the first industrial problems were parleyed there; law and government began with parental authority and discipline; the beginnings of hospitals began with home nursing; the seeds of democracy, education, culture, libraries, social clubs, and character building enterprises found inception in the family.

One by one these historic functions found fruition outside of the home. Due to what we can call progress, quite different patterns have emerged, and the family is not the compact unit of former years.

The American family has gone through especially rapid and radical changes this past half century, affecting not only work habits but moral values and home ideals as well. The sacredness, seriousness and permanency of marriage and the home are often called into question today. The weakened home has lowered the moral standards in political, social and economic life and greater responsibilities have fallen to educational institutions. Many are concerned about this state of affairs, for history teaches that a nation is no stronger than its homes.

It is reasonable and good that the family, with its problems and functions, is being seriously studied today. A small army of sociologists and psychologists is busy probing into the effects on the home of environmental conditions, improper housing, educational standards, working mothers, suburban fathers, the standards and habits of youth.

Slowly it dawned to some that religion might be the answer, and now religion and the home is becoming everyone's topic. There is an endless stream of opinions in the books and articles which roll from the press. Practical suggestions for homemakers are offered to all who read. Social science has given us the family court, domestic rehabilitation and character building programs.

Sociologists are making a noble effort to stem the tide; the religious groups that go all out for the "house on the sands" are generally liberal. We disagree with both, and are dubious of their success, but what are we doing in this day of home crisis? How much oil are we, as a Christian church, pouring upon the troubled waters? Are we humbly and prayerfully standing on the threshold of the American home and counseling that "**except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it**"; that it is the spirit, the heart, of the home that must pulsate with the love of God? Are we, as Christian parents, keeping our own altar fires burning?

There has always been concern about the family because of its place in the scheme of life. When we take our home problem to the Bible we learn that God made the human race on the family plan from the beginning (Genesis 1:26-28; 4:1, 2; 5:1ff). There are some 3,000 references to the family in the Bible, and many of its great truths are couched in family terms (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 31:1; Malachi 1:6; 2:10; Luke 15:11ff; John 14:2; Ephesians 3:15; I John 4:20, 21). All the great promises of God are given to the family, and parents are specifically and repeatedly enjoined to train their children on earth that they may be together in heaven. The New Testament, as well as the Old, begins with the family. Jesus forever sanctioned marriage and blessed the family by His presence and His miraculous gift at the wedding in Cana in Galilee.

He restored the dignity of the woman in the home, respected and obeyed His mother, and gladly accepted hospitality and fellowship in the home of friends. He often pointed to the role of a father (Matthew 7:9-11; 21: 28; Luke 15:11ff), looked deep into the heart of a mother (John 16:21; Matthew 15:21-11), and proclaimed to all the worth of a little child (Matthew 18:1-6).

The loyalty and unity of the Old Testament home was an example to the ancient world. There is a lovely sketch in Psalm 128 of such a peaceful, prosperous, happy home. This beautiful old picture has been put in the attic of our complex age, but it might be well to brush away the cobwebs and let it speak to us again. It teaches us that the home is for the family. The woman who worships her home so much that her husband and children cannot relax in it has a badly misplaced sense of values. There can be no real harmony and happiness in a home which is only a showplace of furnishings too fine to be used.

The picture in Psalms is also that of highly integrated “togetherness” which is lacking in our homes today. It shows the blessedness of family fellowship, of love and sharing, of work and worship, rest, security and happiness. Religion holds this home together and makes it strong. They not only profess to love the Lord, but also walk in His ways.

No matter what changes have come about since those early days, basic ideals and moral values must remain the same. This, and the growing freedom of the individual which tends to cloud the principles of love and sharing, presents a mighty challenge to the Christian parent. We are all affected by this modern trend. We are inclined to be selfish, to exploit our own homes, and are the poorer for it.

Somehow our children have learned that for all education and culture, fellowship, fun and good food, to find understanding and helpful friends, they must “go out.” Many parents, too, must “go out” to relax, and dinner in some crowded, noisy place is top fare. Many fathers are so taken up with affairs of business and outside interests that the children wonder if their father still lives at home! We are fast becoming families of independents instead of inter-dependents as God planned the family structure. This can lead only to frustrated parents and insecure children, to homes which must fail their task.

There are homes everywhere, but only one for each of us. God, in His divine wisdom, arranges for the intimate relationship of certain people, in a certain place, for the enrichment of their own lives, for the good and blessing of the larger community in which they live, and for the gathering together of the family of heaven (Acts 2:39). In God’s plan each needs the other: the strong, the young, the old, and the crippled one; each in the interacting of personalities contributes to the development of the other.

We choose our friends on the basis of common interests or compatibility. If we occasionally differ we can avoid them for a while. At home we have to take our relatives for what they are, with all their differences of age, interests, temperaments and irritating peculiarities. Moreover, we have to love them, learn to live with them, appreciate and thank God for the differences of temperament, talent, and interests within a single family.

How dull it would be if everyone was exactly like the other! Is it pride or too great a valuation of self that causes jealousies, irritations, self-pity, because of family differences? These are meant to enrich family fellowship and service, and to show forth the glory of the Creator of the family. Nevertheless, conflicts and tensions are bound to arise in the best of homes because our personalities are warped by sin.

In a Christian home conflicts and tensions can be resolved before they cause a real rift in family relationships. God's Word is our guide, and in it we find abundant instructions for harmonious and godly family living (study, for example, Exodus 20:1-21; Proverbs 4:1-4; Colossians 3:12-17; I Timothy 5:4). Faith and trust in God must be the atmosphere (Psalm 37:3-5; II Timothy 2:1-4; James 1:5, 6). Everywhere we read that concern for one's brother is of paramount importance (Genesis 4:9-11; I Corinthians 8:11ff), and that family love must be rooted in God (I John 4:7, 20, 21).

If we are building our homes **"in Him and through Him, and unto Him,"** religion in the home will be more than an added ingredient or a booster shot of happiness. It will be a new life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:4; Colossians 3), a life permeated with a love which is rooted in God. This will issue in the most precious "togetherness," and togetherness results in sharing. Sharing shapes a family (Philippians 2:1-8), and the blessings flow on and on as each child becomes, in turn, the head of another family. These ideals can be attained only by much prayer, planning, instruction, and persevering with humble reliance upon the Lord (Psalm 127:1).

In a real sense home is a school, the most influential school in all the world. The parents are the teachers whether they know it or not. It is in the early years of life, when subject to no other influence than that of parents, that a child's feet are set upon the path of life. When Jesus placed a child in the midst of men (Matthew 18:1-6), He was commending the spiritual qualities of the child, his complete trust in his parents, his sense of wonder, open-mindedness, sincerity and loyalty. Fresh from the hand of God, sensitively impressionable, his home is his world and he accepts its standards and attitudes uncritically. What a responsibility the Lord has laid on parents! Jesus spoke His sharpest words to any who dared, through neglect or otherwise, **"despise"** or **"offend one of these little ones"** (Matthew 18:6, 10).

Many are the lessons learned and values acquired when we, as a family, share experiences, confidences and problems (Galatians 6:2); when we share in the making of decisions, in success and happiness (I Corinthians 12:25,26); when we share disappointments and sorrows for the sake of Christ (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:9; James 2:14-18).

Bearing each other's burdens may also mean sharing work. Many a worn and distracted mother has not taught children the dignity and blessing of work. There are many household tasks that can be shared by little family members. Neither should children, grown old enough to have a job, treat home like a hotel where one is waited on.

No one should be overburdened while others are idle. Love will not allow it (Philippians 2: 1-7). Home should be a place where we love, live and learn to work together.

There should be time for family fellowship and fun.

There are many happy things to share: holidays and festive occasions, cultural activities and recreation, and everyday family fellowship. Social relations always root in the home. The family can be called the world in miniature, where we learn the spirit of cooperation, appreciation of each other and of the beautiful in life, the practice of which we carry over into all other labor and social relationships (Colossians 3:17; I Peter 2:17).

If we must play and work together we must surely worship together in the achievement of the home. In the quiet hour of family worship we find courage and strength for the day, forgiveness, rest and renewal at the end, reason and inspiration for each new endeavor. Yet, we are told that few homes are left which have regular family devotions, and that today our family **“altars are as heaps in the furrows of the field”** (Hosea 12:11). The family cannot be won without an effective approach through devotional life (Psalms 34; 128).

The child’s first religious education (II Timothy 3:14ff), experience of prayer and worship is in the home. Not to bring our children to Jesus as soon as they walk toward anyone is to wrong them, perhaps irreparably. What better time and place than around the table in family devotions?

The wise parents let nothing infringe on that time of precious fellowship which is sanctified by the Word and prayer together. But we need more worship in the home than family devotions at mealtime. Dare we say that we need to rekindle the fires on the family altar?

Our way of life militates against it. But, who knows what blessing the Lord will give to those who gather in His Name and presence? Think of what it would mean for the family to search the Word together, discuss religious questions, the spiritual needs of the family and community, of Christ for the world, to sing and pray together. Children, when taught to pray, must be given a sense of vocation and of the needs of others. They must be taught how to use the Bible. Personal Bible study is not only a must for mothers, but for every member of the family.

The natural outcome of family worship is public worship. The Christian family has always been the nucleus of the church (Genesis 17:1-9; Acts 2:46; 16:32, 33; Romans 16:5), the conservator of the faith (II Timothy 1:5), and a witness to the world, a living epistle, **“known and read of all men.”**

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is there so much concern about the American home today?
2. What is a sociologist? Do we need Christian sociologists? Why, or why not?
3. Differentiate “conflict” from “tensions.” Which is more likely to cause family disorganization? Is all conflict in the family wrong? Explain.
4. Suggest common causes of family troubles. How do you suppose non-Christian families deal with them? How should Christian families solve them? Give examples.
5. How do you account for the fact that there are so many fine families in non-Christian homes?
6. How would you interpret Colossians three for the family?
7. What are the dangers of letting the material side of homemaking predominate?
8. Name great Bible truths which are made plain to us in family terms.

9. What makes the home the most influential school on earth?
10. What is the purpose of the home? The family? What unifies it and makes it strong?
11. What does working together do for the family; family fellowship and fun; family worship? What does it do for the individual?
12. At what age should children begin to help with family tasks, and how much is it right for them to do? Why do you suppose they dislike some of these tasks?
13. Make practical suggestions for interesting and beneficial family worship.
14. A writer on family problems listed what he called the Ten Commandments for Young Parents. If you were to make such a list, what would you write?

**~ end of chapter 2 ~**

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