

How to Have A Family Altar

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Divine Blueprint for the Christian Home

IN THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CHAPTERS of Ephesians we have GOD's blueprint for a Christian home. I don't believe there is one part of the blueprint missing from these two chapters. Many times we hear the question, "What is a Christian home?" From GOD's own Word we can give a perfect answer to that important question.

GOD's blueprint for a Christian home involves these ten relationships:

1. The family to GOD (5:1)
2. The family to holiness (vv. 3-5)
3. The family to time (vv. 15, 16)
4. The family to the HOLY SPIRIT (v. 18)
5. The family to worship (vv. 19, 20)
6. The wife to the husband (v. 22)
7. The husband to the wife (v. 25)
8. The children to the parents (6:1)
9. The fathers to the children (6:4)
10. The family to the invisible powers of darkness (6:12-18)

If you want to see why homes are breaking up, hold them up alongside this divine blueprint and see how they really look in the sight of GOD. GOD has commandments for every one of these relationships. A home wherein these commandments are obeyed is a strong home. Many professing Christians would be out of line on nearly every one of these ten relationships! No wonder the homes of so many Christians are spiritually weak and confused.

No wonder our church life is so anemic and revival is a hope rather than an actuality. Can the waters be sweet when the fountain is bitter?

1. Relationship of the family to GOD.

The other blessings of individual and family life are bound up in salvation. **"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children."** In trusting the Lord JESUS CHRIST as our very own personal Saviour, we receive the very life of CHRIST or the very life of GOD and are thus His own children. Is everyone in your family saved?

2. Relationship of the family to holiness.

In Ephesians 5:3-5 we have GOD's commandment concerning holy living. What GOD says here

applies in general to all phases of a believer's life and in particular to his home life. We want to notice just a few of GOD's commandments concerning holy living.

All uncleanness and filthiness is forbidden.

In Psalm 24:3 the Psalmist adds, "**Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?**" The answer is found in verse four, "**He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.**" Nothing unclean can be permitted in the Christian home. The stories told must be clean; the pictures on the walls must be clean; there must be no magazines lying around with suggestive stories and pictures. We can't go into GOD's presence without purity, and neither will GOD come into our presence without purity. In Deuteronomy 23:14 we read: "**For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.**"

GOD requires purity, and He will withdraw from the home that is not pure in its dress, its literature, its pictures, and its conversation.

In verse 4 GOD warns against "**foolish talking.**" There should be a genuine place in every home for holy laughter and for a genuine sense of humor. But GOD warns that in many words there wanteth not sin. CHRIST has warned us that we shall be judged for every idle word. GOD warns against "**jesting.**" A jesting spirit does not consider the solemn realities of Heaven, hell, death, and judgment. Real saints never have a jesting spirit.

We should notice that GOD warns against covetousness (v. 3). Many fathers and mothers are trying to keep up with the Joneses, or they are trying to have more beautiful wearing apparel, or a more beautiful car, home or furniture than someone else. Many Christian fathers and mothers are laying up treasures on the earth, and some have a covetous spirit; are they not responsible if their children grow up to sell GOD for gold? Many parents talk a beautiful Christian profession with their lips while at the same time grasping with their two hands for as much of this world's goods as they can carry. In this case the spiritual atmosphere of the home will be determined by what the hands are doing and not what the lips are saying. How awful if there are men and women in hell because of their parents' covetous spirit!

3. Relationship of the family to time.

In verses 15 and 16 we read, "**See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time.**" "Another evidence of spiritual stupor in this tragic hour is the time employed in most Christian homes to the affairs of this life . . . The spiritual needs of their own families and of a needy humankind are left in utter neglect.

Is it any wonder that the work and witness of the Lord is in fearful apostasy because of the need of zealous daughters and stalwart sons of GOD to be about their Father's business?"

4. Relationship of the family to the HOLY SPIRIT.

Verses 1 and 18 are commands to enablements. Obedience to the other commands requires the

enablements derived from obeying these two commands. All too many Christians are content just to be saved. To be a child of GOD is blessed indeed; when we are saved we receive the HOLY SPIRIT as the seal of our redemption and our present foretaste of heavenly glories. But while we receive the HOLY SPIRIT when we are saved, it is infrequent that He does usually receive all of us. **"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit"** (5:18).

No parent can fulfill all his responsibilities to his children without the filling of the HOLY SPIRIT. The children can't be what they should be without the filling of the HOLY SPIRIT. If the HOLY SPIRIT is pre-eminent in the home, He will give overcoming grace to the members of the family in all the difficulties, sorrows, and struggles of life.

Perhaps some of you are sincerely asking, "How can I be filled with the HOLY SPIRIT?" Turn in your Bible to Romans 12:1. The answer to the question you ask is very simple. **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."**

Notice all that is involved here:

- separation - **"Present your bodies a living sacrifice... unto God"**;
- cleanliness - **"holy"**;
- dedication and acceptance - **"acceptable unto God"** (Cf. II Corinthians 6:17, 18).

Miss Havergal put it correctly when she said:

"Take my lips . . . Take my hands . . . Take my feet." We must present all we are: body, soul, spirit, will, imagination; all we have: hopes, plans, money, time to Him as His henceforth forevermore! Then the Spirit will fill us, and in filling us He will renew our minds reveal GOD's will to us (Romans 12:2), and enable us for service (Romans 12:4-8).

You might pray for fifty years for the filling, but if you did not make this absolutely complete dedication of all you are or ever hope to be, you would never be filled with the HOLY SPIRIT. Without extended prayer, except to make this dedication and then ask Him to fill you, you will be filled. You might not feel any different, but if you made this total dedication, you were taken possession of by the HOLY SPIRIT. You might feel full of ecstasy, have a great wave of glory roll over your soul, but if you did not make this total dedication you would not be filled with the HOLY SPIRIT.

Then look at Acts 5:32: **"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."** Dedication must be followed by obedience.

Look at Luke 11:13: **"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."** In Mark 11:24 we read: **"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever you desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."**

5. Relationship of the family to worship.

Verses 19 and 20 might be called the divine overflow out of the divine filling of verse 18. Remember JESUS' words, "**He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**" (John 7:38).

It is really no mystery why most Christian families don't have any time for a family altar; we must be filled before we can overflow. The family altar for the feeding of the soul is as natural and as enjoyable as the table for the feeding of our bodies to those who are filled with the HOLY SPIRIT. I have often felt that instead of asking people if they have a family altar in their home it would be much wiser to ask them if they are filled with the HOLY SPIRIT.

The worship of GOD is not usually desirable to the man filled with his own will or to the family that is made up of self-willed individuals, even though they may go by the label of "Christian". But to those who are filled it is a blessed privilege to establish a daily time for the entire family to gather around the open Word of GOD, a time when they speak "**in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in [their] hearts to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (see Ephesians 5:19). No better description of a happy family altar time could be given than this.

And now from the heart full of the HOLY SPIRIT, overflowing with the glad praise and joy of worship, GOD quickly brings us to the point of everyday responsibility one to another. The fullness of the HOLY SPIRIT does not make people proud, domineering, or overbearing to others, but humble, submitting themselves to one another in the fear of GOD.

6. The relationship of the wife to the husband.

Some teach that the wife is to be submitted to the husband and the children to the parents, but they do not seem to realize that the husband and father is also to be submitted to every other member of his family.

No one is free from the law of submission (5:21); all are to be subject to each other. The only question is how is each one to be subject to the other. In verse 22, GOD says, "**Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything**" (5:22-25).

A saved wife may ask if she should render obedience to an unsaved husband. The answer is Yes, in all things except conscience. No wife is bound to obey her husband if his way and command is in sin or is morally wrong.

For the command in verse twenty-two says, "**as unto the Lord.**" Her very life of meek, sweet obedience will be used of GOD to win him. Notice what GOD says, "**Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear, whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair,**

and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of GOD of great price" (I Peter 3:1-4).

Many saved wives ask other Christians to pray that their unsaved husbands will be saved. That is commendable, but the prayers of other Christians will not take the place of her own obedient, meek life before her husband.

7. The relationship of the husband to the wife.

"Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it."

Husbands as well as wives are failing in all too many cases to live up to the requirements of GOD's divine blueprint for their home life. Here again we see the need for the fullness of the HOLY SPIRIT. It won't be difficult for a man to love his wife if he is filled with the holy, loving Spirit of GOD.

The wife who is obedient to her husband, even as the Church is obedient to CHRIST, and the husband who is loving to his wife, even as CHRIST is loving to His Church will find their home a sanctuary of the sweet peace and harmony of Heaven. As the children behold the obedience of the mother they will be encouraged by her holy example to be obedient. As the children behold the abounding love of the father, they will be encouraged by his holy example to be loving and kind and tender. Obedience springs from love.

8. The relationship of the children to the parents.

In 6:1, 2 GOD lays before children the double duty and privilege of obeying and honoring their parents. The child will be forever bound to honor, but he will be required to obey only until he is of age. We have strongly emphasized that what the child sees in his home between his father and mother will strongly influence him toward either obedience or disobedience. Of course as the child grows older we fully realize that he cannot render spiritual obedience to this command apart from being a child of GOD (5:1) and filled with the HOLY SPIRIT (5:18).

Too, the child needs the daily ministry of GOD's Word around the family altar, for all that GOD has for him he must receive through the Word.

That is why in verse 4 GOD commands the fathers to bring up their children **"in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."** Young Timothy was a real delight to the aging apostle Paul. Timothy's love and devotion to CHRIST brought joy to Paul's heart. Yet Timothy's devotion was no accident and not the result of some happy coincidence. In II Timothy 3:14, Paul reveals the source of Timothy's spiritual strength. **"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. . . ."**

We will cut off the verse right there for a moment. What we have read reveals that Timothy had been nourished on the Scriptures from a child. Now what are the Scriptures able to do for a child? **"And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able:**

1. **To make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."**

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable

2. For Doctrine

3. For Reproof

4. For Correction

5. For Instruction in Righteousness."

Timothy had been the fortunate benefactor of every one of these blessings "**from a child,**" for he had been taught the Scriptures "**from a child.**"

And what is the end of all these blessings? "**That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**" And, the truth is that we all enjoy these five blessings daily as we gather around GOD's open Word. And remember it is the father's direct responsibility to lead out in these things and to be the priest in his own home (6:4).

9. The family and the relationship to the invisible powers of darkness (6:11-18).

Paul shows us that our greatest enemies are invisible principalities, powers, rulers of darkness. These invisible armies of demon spirits infest the atmosphere and by constant strategy seek to bring trouble, quarreling, worrying, doubts, jealousy, envy and all the other works of the flesh, into the lives of members in the home! The demons are trying to shut out the sweet light of Heaven. Because of their demon power we sense the negative forces of opposition, but because of their invisibility to our physical eye we miss the real culprits and pin our eyes upon some flesh-and-blood object as the source of oppression.

And the sad, sad thing is the real culprits of it all go on working unknown and unsuspected. So GOD says through Paul: "**For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness**" (6:12). Well does Paul say, "**For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds**" (II Corinthians 10:3, 4).

Let us remember then as Christian families that our warfare is against Satan and the weapons of our warfare are *truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and persevering prayer.*

These are the weapons of the Christian family as we seek to bind the powers of darkness and keep the victory and joy of the Lord JESUS CHRIST prevailing in our family relationships.

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