

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on January 5, 1958 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC.

Of the many memories of my childhood some of the happiest are of quiet evenings at home when my father would read to my mother and me. Sometimes he would read from the Bible; sometimes he would read from other materials. I remember his reading from the series of fine "Scattergood Baines" stories by Clarence Buddington Kelland, which appeared in the *American Magazine*. Scattergood was the genial banker, merchant, businessman in a little up-state town of New York, who was constantly helping people who were in trouble and constantly serving as a kindly grandfather to the whole community. At other times the reading was the Alexander Botts series of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Botts was a salesman for the Earthworm Tractor Company, and was constantly getting into and out of trouble. Those evenings a quarter of a century ago are still vivid in my memory.

Most of us have happy memories of childhood experiences in happy homes. Most of us, however, are also aware that not every home is a happy home, and not every home is effectively doing the things that homes are supposed to do. There is a good bit of evidence that the home of the 20th century is "breaking up." The divorce rate in our generation is higher than at any previous time in history. Although the climb in the statistics has not leveled off, we are still on a very high and disturbing plateau.

### Failure In Training Children

Also, among many of the homes which do not break up there is evidence of less and less influence in the training of the children. General moral foundations seem to be crumbling; modesty and decency are on the defensive. Moral skepticism is common. Juvenile delinquency is a problem of national importance. Young people today seem to be deprived of basic instruction on such subjects as honesty, respect for parents, obedience of law, respect for property, the importance of purity and virtue, and similar subjects. Many parents have forgotten the meaning of these subjects or have betrayed the youth entrusted to their care. We must reinstate these teachings or else we shall have moral anarchy.

The present-day growing disorganization of family life is convincing everyone that success in home-building is not easily achieved. Hence, the upsurge in courses in home-building, articles in newspapers and magazines on marriage, the establishment of family clinics, and the establishment of domestic relations courts.

As Lewis J. Sherrill says in his book *Family and Church*, "A disturbed and critical condition is indicated by the very terms used in titles of recent books and articles, or in describing experiments, such as: the changing family, the drifting home, marriage in transition, the marriage crisis, family disorganization, family disintegration, trial marriage, companionate marriage, doctors of matrimony, conservation of the family. Such terms are not mere rhetoric, they are indicative of facts.

### Happiness

Another fact of real significance is the fact that an adequate home is essential to happiness. As William F. Ogburn, of the University of Chicago, has said in his preface to Nimkoff's, *The Family*, "Everyone wants at least two things out of life, a higher standard of living, and happiness. The higher standard of living, more money to spend, is a function of our economic institutions. Happiness is a function of the family, probably more than of any other social institution unless it be the church. Of course, happiness is individual; but what we are as individuals is determined by our social institutions except in so far as heredity may play a part. Our capacity for happiness is probably determined largely by the influences affecting us during the tender years of childhood, mainly spent in the family environment. Whether or not we find happiness in adult life is dependent in good part on our success in mating and forming a successful family life."

The happiness, not only of the two persons who establish the home and their offspring, but of the nation in general depends upon the making of a success out of marriage. But when marriage becomes widespread in its failure, the nation invariably suffers, for the home is the foundation stone of the nation.

It is our purpose to present on succeeding Sundays several studies concerning the Christian home. There are many foundations, basis, premises, upon which the home may be built, but our assumption is that the Christian basis is the only basis which guarantees success. It has often been said that if both husband and wife are true Christians, a successful home is assured. This is probably true, however, it is very difficult for the husband and wife to be fully Christian without having made a special and careful study of marriage, its responsibilities and privileges. Too many people rush into marriage without figuring out what is expected and without proper preparation to fulfill the demands of marriage. It shall be our purpose to point out some of the privileges, blessings, and joys of marriage, along with some of the responsibilities and obligations which marriage entails.

Marriage originated in the mind of God. For the happiness and good of man God established the first home, and has made the home a continuing part of his plan for the welfare of men throughout history. It is in the second chapter of the Bible that the home is first revealed, "And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:23-24).

In the first chapter of Genesis we find the expression, "And God saw that it was good," repeated six times. In the fourth verse it is mentioned after God created light. In the tenth verse it occurs after God has divided the dry land from the sea. In verse twelve it is repeated after God's creation of the grass and herbs. In verse eighteen it appears immediately after the sun, moon, and stars were made. In verse twenty-one it again appears after the creation of fish and winged creatures. The final time that the expression occurs in the first chapter of Genesis is in verse twenty-five after the creation of animals. A little later when the chapter draws to its close we read, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31). I should like to include the home along with these other creations of God which are very good. It is one of God's good gifts to men. We remember the passage from the pen of James, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation neither shadow that is cast by turning." (James 1:17). God gave us the home and it is very good.

### Benefits for Society

There are many benefits and blessings which come from the Christian home. First of all there are a number of benefits which come to society in general. Procreation. One item of the family's work is to supply society with its population. The home alone can give honorable birth to children. Illegitimacy always means sin, shame, and suffering to everyone involved. As inevitably as the night follows the day there will be suffering when children are born outside the realm of God's law.

One of the most indelible memories that I brought home with me from Korea was a visit to the orphanage on the lower level of the compound which our brethren have in Seoul. There one finds a large building which is divided into three rooms. The first is a workroom, where the office work, ironing, and other necessary tasks are performed. Next, there is the nursery, with children everywhere, and beds all the way to the ceiling. In the third room, there are the toddlers, so thick that you could hardly walk between them. Altogether there were eighty of these children--each the child of an American father and of a Korean mother. Such children in Korea are outcasts, so a farmer in Oregon by the name of Holt conceived the idea of bringing them over to America to be adopted into American homes. By a special act of Congress he was permitted to do so, and has since brought 587 children to the States. Half a dozen have been adopted into his own home. The very existence of these children is an evidence of the need of Christian teaching. Illegitimacy is ugly in Korea, just as it is in America and everywhere else in the world.

Society honors motherhood and exerts a strong social pressure toward the end of bearing children. Innumerable jokes are heard about mothers-in-law, but few, if any, are made about motherhood. Abortion is made a criminal offense. Sometimes subsidies are offered by various governments to induce mothers to have more children. Even in the United States the income tax laws give special consideration to those who have a number of children. Yes, society is served by the home, when it provides in an honorable way the oncoming population.

Preservation of culture. A second service which the home renders to society in general is the teaching of language, customs, and the general system of living which the race or nation endorses. All of these are transmitted in the family to the new offspring. In addition, individual family traditions, trade secrets, and basic attitudes are also passed on to the new citizens. The preservation of the American way of life is largely insured by reason of the training that children receive in their homes.

### Benefits For Husbands and Wives

Husbands and wives also receive benefits from the home. These benefits are equally real and are deeply satisfying to those involved. Satisfaction of biological needs. Marriage has as one of its purposes a provision of an arrangement wherein mates may receive adequate satisfaction of their sex needs. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he said, "Let the husband render unto the wife her due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." (I Cor. 7:3). This relationship is not cheap and ugly, as it is outside of marriage, but it is noble and exalted when carried on within the realm which God has provided. God made us the way we are, with certain hungers. The satisfaction of those hungers in the way that God specifies is beautiful and even sublime.

Intimate companionship. Few lines of poetry are more familiar or more beloved than those of Robert Browning, in his "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Grow old along with me,  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life,  
For which the first was made.

Notice that it says, "along with me." Growing old is not the attraction but the companionship. Few pictures are more beautiful than an elderly couple, whose hair is gray and whose lips are tender, still enjoying being together after half a century of intimate companionship. Not only do parents enjoy each other's companionship, but they also enjoy the affection of their offspring. Think of how much it has meant when you have picked your own children up in your arms to love them. Think also of how much it has meant in later years when they have come back and put their arms around you, strengthening and sustaining you. Wholesome personality must have this affectional satisfaction. Love is a necessary ingredient for happiness and stability of life.

Enlargement of life. Dr. Paul Popenoe, in his book, *Modern Marriage*, goes so far as to say that a man who never marries lives only one-third of life, that those who marry but never have children know only two-thirds of life, and that only those who marry and have children live all of life. Marriage and parenthood broaden one's interest, as anyone who has had children and grandchildren can tell you.

Security. The marriage arrangement works to the advantage of both parties so far as economic matters are concerned. The husband has the responsibility of being the breadwinner, and of bringing into the home the necessary provisions. The wife has the responsibility of preparing the food, keeping the house clean, and bearing the children. To use the expression of the scriptures, she is to be a "keeper at home." A distribution of labor between men and women benefits each. The present day trends threaten to upset this arrangement by taking the women out of the home. The results cannot be good for the home. Also, in later years when the parents are no longer able to care for themselves children step into the picture and return the care to parents which the parents so generously provided for them in infancy.

Regeneration. The members of the family are "on good behavior" when in public. This produces strains and stresses, for when we have to dress well, remember our manners, and constantly be on our "p's" and "q's" we find that it causes mental and physical exhaustion. On the other hand, in the privacy of the home is the place where one no longer needs to wear the "mask" and can "let his hair down" and ease these tensions.

Recreational activities are more valuable when enjoyed by the family as a whole. Especially husbands and wives should spend their leisure time together so far as possible. Separation in the use of leisure time often leads to a broken home.

#### Benefits For Children

Children also benefit greatly from the home. Control of environment. The family provides the child with physical survival and security. No other creature is as helpless as a baby. In the home he receives food, shelter, clothing, and protection. The family provides the child also with social status. He is given a name and is provided with family background and reputation.

Inculcation of religious and social values. The home is largely responsible for the training of children. Other agencies such as the public school and the Sunday school may properly be called in to help the home, but these must never be relied upon as a substitute for the home. In the home religious teaching should be an important part of each day's activities. Prayer, Bible study, and family worship are of supreme importance, for faith acquired around mother's knee remains through life as a support and safeguard.

Discipline is also best taught in the home. Habits and manners are best taught by those who love the child. Police and juvenile courts are poor substitutes for a well-ordered home. The family is able to exercise discipline through love, training, example and many other channels not possible with formal agencies.

Orientation. In the complex civilization in which we live, the child needs some dependable agency to tell him what is good and what is bad, what is wise and foolish, what is true and false, in the world about him. The family explains the world to the child. It is the medium through which the child may gradually be introduced to the world at large. This process requires some twenty years of careful effort.

#### Conclusion

In forthcoming weeks we shall study other aspects of the home, and shall endeavor to make our studies practical and specific. In the meantime, let us remember that God gave us the home. He also gave us the rules and regulations for conducting the home, in the inspired word of God. Let us remember also that the home is for our own happiness and good. We need to study its many aspects, its privileges, its blessings, its responsibilities, and its dangers. Our purpose in such study is that we may make our homes better and that we may help the young to establish homes that are truly Christian homes. Finally, we should like to suggest that the only real basis for establishing a home is the basis suggested in Christianity. For a home to be ideal and happy each member must be a Christian. Why not take that first step toward the establishment of a happy home today?