

IN THE MAKING OF DECISIONS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on January 24, 1965 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

It is obvious to every careful student of the Bible that the primary emphasis is usually placed upon men rather than upon women. It is also obvious, however, that women play an important role at many points in the scripture narrative. Passing by Sarah, Deborah, and Hannah, of the Old Testament, I would pause in the New Testament to mention Mary the mother of our Lord. Her place is unmistakably important though she is not to be exalted as some have exalted her, almost to the point of deity. Her influence upon Christ, when he was a child, must have been great. The respect shown her in the early church is also impressive, for she is mentioned by name as being among the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, awaiting the establishment of the kingdom. (Acts 1:14).

Another woman mentioned prominently in the New Testament is Dorcas, who is described as a "woman full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." (Acts 9:36). In Acts 18:26, we read that Priscilla and Aquilla took the eloquent evangelist Apollos aside and taught him the way of the Lord more accurately. It is significant that the wife is mentioned first in this description. Finally, I would mention the prominence given in the opening chapter of II Timothy to the grandmother, Lois, and the mother, Eunice, of the young man Timothy. These and others indicate that women were not unimportant in the Biblical period.

It is for this and other reasons that I would like to emphasize the significance of the place of the Christian wife and mother in the affairs of our day. From time to time the messages which I deliver from this pulpit are directed toward certain groups within the congregation. For example, occasionally I bring a message primarily for young people, or for the aged, or for prospective elders and deacons, or for teachers. Our study today is primarily for women.

In addition to the emphasis given in the scriptures, we can feel the significance of Christian womanhood from the very fact that women outnumber men in the church by a significant margin. In addition, Christian women are often more spiritually minded than men. In the church today women constitute a vast reservoir of power, though this potential is often only partially recognized and used.

It is the Christian woman's influence upon her family that I am most concerned in discussing today. The making of decisions, under any circumstances, is a most interesting subject. It is interesting to notice by whom the decision is made ... when it is made ... and what factors are involved. It is my belief that when the most important family decisions are made the Christian wife and mother is in an admirable position to influence those decisions in the right direction. In the making of decisions concerning those things that matter most, the Christian woman has both her greatest opportunity and her greatest responsibility.

Area I: The Lack of Spiritual Food

The intellectual diet of most American families today is almost exclusively secular. Radio and television fill the hours of each day with the current events of the world about us. These events are predominantly secular. In addition, the average family takes a daily newspaper, and during the course of each week or month receives such magazines as "Time," "Life," "Look," and others. The diet provided by such reading day after day is not calculated to build lives that are spiritually strong. As a consequence, many lives show a noticeable lack of spiritual food.

If I were a doctor and could write a prescription for the average Christian home concerning reading materials, I would include the "Gospel Advocate," the "20th Century Christian," the "Christian Chronicle," and "Power for Today." All of these can be had for an entire year for less than ten dollars. I would then further suggest the "Christian Woman," the "Teenage Christian," the "Ministers' Monthly," the "Voice of Freedom," and "Personal Evangelism." All of these on an annual basis would cost less than twenty dollars. If this seems burdensome, one need only to remember that he spends \$28.60 in the course of a year for a daily newspaper.

Churches of Christ today report something like 2,250,000 members dispersed among some 18,000 congregations. This means between 600,000 and 700,000 families. It is strikingly disturbing to learn that all of the magazines published by members of the church today have a total subscription of less than 225,000. This means hardly one Christian magazine for every three families. How meager the spiritual diet of even the most spiritual families.

It is at this point that I feel that the Christian wife and mother can have a decisive influence. At some quiet time at the end of the day, when the tasks of the day are finished and the children are in bed, she can make a simple suggestion to her husband that will have great effect. It might go something like this, "I've just been thinking. I wish we were subscribing to several of the good Christian magazines, for I feel that they would have a good influence on all of us." The husband responds, "Well, whatever you think best." As a result of her request, they enter a subscription for the three or four or five magazines she suggests. Or, perhaps it would come in a slightly different approach. As her birthday draws near she says something like this, "Instead of giving me a hat, or a purse, or a sweater, or something like that, I would rather have my birthday gift in subscriptions to several of the Christian magazines." There is

not a husband in the world who would not prefer to give his wife what she wishes than something else. In most instances, he will be proud of her and grateful for her spiritual concern.

There is a great need in most of our families for periods of daily worship, Again, the wife's influence can be determinative. For example, after she has prepared the evening meal and calls the family to dinner, it would be very easy and natural for her to say, "God has blessed us so greatly as a family. Let's read a chapter from the Bible before we eat." Her husband is pleased with the suggestion and the family listens as the scriptures are read and then bows in a more-meaningful-than-usual prayer. Or, perhaps it comes later on in the evening just before the family retires. The wife again suggests the reading from the Bible and prayer from each member of the family. It is a memorable and important time for all.

Area II: Support for Every Good Work

There are many calls for financial help today. Many of these are for very fine works that need our support and our concern. A wife's influence in this area also would be invaluable. For example, the Herald of Truth sends a report of progress made and a request for financial help to extend the preaching of the gospel by means of radio and television. It is explained that this year more has been given than ever before, so that now the gospel is being preached over more than 500 radio and television stations. But the same programs could be preached over 1600 radio and television stations, if there were sufficient funds. All that is needed to put the gospel on stations that reach more than 600,000,000 English speaking people is \$1,932,000 per year. A wife's suggestion, that she would like to think of her family as having a part each month in this really significant venture to preach the gospel to the whole world, would have significant influence. Similarly, if she should suggest that a few dollars invested in the World's Fair Exhibit would be fruitful, it would probably mean that a contribution would be made which other wise would not be made. In some instances she would need to say, "Suppose we wait about buying this or that and put a few dollars into this good work." Similarly the appeals from orphans' homes would be much more productive of good if each Christian wife would suggest careful consideration be given to each appeal.

Area III: The Importance of Christian Education

Less than ten percent of the college-age young people who come from Christian homes attend Christian colleges. This means that among those who go to college some 90 percent attend other schools. A second fact of significance, which seems to me to have some relation to this first fact, is the suggestion by thoughtful observers of the brotherhood that over half of our young people are eventually lost to the church. While at first this seemed to me an unbelievably high Percentage, close observation for a period of ten years has led me reluctantly to feel that these estimates are within the realm of believability. Somehow, some say, we need to do more in the training of our young people to anchor them to Christ and his church.

It is in this connection that I have come to be a firm believer in the value of Christian education, for Christian schools provide a Christian environment in which young people live and work. Every subject is taught by a Christian teacher, whether that subject be Bible or biology. This is especially significant when one realizes that many biologists describe the origin of our planet as merely the condensation of cosmic dust and leave God completely out of the picture. In addition, our Christian colleges provide young people with Christian companions and this is most significant for it happens during the period when young people choose their life partners. It is obvious that each young person marries someone he knows, or to put it another way, each young person marries someone with whom he associates during the years normally covered by college attendance. If we want our children to marry in the church, we need to place them in an environment where they will associate primarily with other young people who are members of the church. The Christian school has this advantage.

In this connection, I believe the Christian mother plays a very significant part in determining where her children will attend college. If she does have in mind the sending of her children to a Christian college she needs to plant the idea early, even when her children are small and hardly know the meaning of the word college. To wait until they are ready for high school graduation, is to wait until the suggestion would be largely ineffective. It would then be too late.

Area IV: Support For the Church

In supporting the work of the local congregation the Christian wife and mother also has great potential influence. Take, for example, the area of attendance. It is a disturbing fact that fewer than 50 percent of the average congregation return for the evening worship. The same is true concerning attendance on prayer meeting night. It is my belief that if a Christian wife and mother should suggest to her husband and family that they attend services on Sunday evening, in most cases she would be able to influence the family to respond to this suggestion. It might be that she would have to go alone, or alone with the children, for a time, but eventually if she attends faithfully and regularly, it will mean that her husband and the entire family will attend with her,

In the area of financial giving, too, the Christian woman can have a great influence. It has been estimated after some surveys have been taken that the average member of the church today gives only three or four percent of his income to the Lord. What kind of influence would it have if a wife should ask her husband, "How much do we give to the Lord?" She has equally as much right to know the family income and its disposition as does the husband. In some instances it would mean that the family would really face the issue for the first time about what percentage they are giving. Then, if she should follow up her question by the suggestion, "Let's give

more. Let's try to give ten percent of everything that we get," it is my belief that it would have a great effect in increasing the contribution of her family.

Area V: The Need for More Workers

There is no more disturbing shortage in the church today than the shortage of preachers. From all reports it now appears that there are only about 6,000 who are active in the Lord's work today. When we remember that there are at least twice that many congregations already in existence and that there are more than 100,000 nameable towns and cities in the United States where there is no known church of Christ, this shortage appears overwhelming. When we move outside our own borders to the 93 percent of the world's population who live outside the United States, we feel crushed by the need of more gospel preachers. There is a great shortage of missionaries, for there are only approximately 450, counting men and women, engaged in work outside our own borders at the present time. There is a further shortage of qualified teachers even in some of the strongest congregations.

In these key areas, the Christian mother holds a position of great influence. It is my belief that no person has a greater possibility of influencing a little boy to want to become a preacher than his mother. Only when mothers and fathers really desire their children to grow up to be preachers, or to marry preachers, will we have more preachers. Only when Christian parents want their children to become missionaries will we significantly increase the number of missionaries in the field. In all of this, the Christian woman has a great responsibility and a great potentiality of influence.

Conclusion

When family decisions are made Christian wives and mothers have great opportunities for influence. Their suggestions, tactfully and thoughtfully given, can make a world of difference in the Christian dedication of a family. May all of us realize that we live this life only once and that our opportunities for Christian influence come only once. May it be that we use these opportunities while we have them, so that there will be no regrets in the years to come. May we dedicate ourselves to God and his Cause above everything else. It is wonderful to be a Christian woman. It is wonderful to have such influence on the lives of those about one. It is frightening to feel the impact of the responsibility that this influence entails. In a very real sense the Christian woman helps to determine the eternal destiny of her family--and of herself.