

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on June 28, 1970 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Admiral Richard E. Byrd tells a story of some tense moments during his first expedition to the South Pole. For a time he was living alone in an isolated hut far from any other members of the expedition. One day he left the hut for a brief trip of exploration, only to be engulfed in a sudden blizzard which left him hopelessly lost. In that barren whiteness there was nothing to give him any sense of direction. He knew that if he should strike out blindly to find his hut, and if he should fail, the chances were that he would freeze in the storm. He had a long pole which he always carried to feel for holes in the ice, so he stuck it into the snow and tied a scarf to it. In telling of the experience he said, "That was my center. If I failed to find my hut, I could return to the center and try again. Three times I tried and failed; but each time I returned to my center, without which I would have been lost and would have died. In the fourth attempt, I stumbled upon my hut."

In this little story the expression, "that was my center," plays a central role. I would like to suggest that just as the pole and scarf were the center to which Admiral Byrd continually returned and by which his life was saved, so in our society the home is our center. As we come into this world and as we grow up amid the confusing complexities of life, it is the home which is our center. To it we return again and again. In it we find rest and strength. It furnishes us a base from which to operate and without it we are unstable and insecure.

Karl Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, among other things, attacked the home. He wrote, "The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course with the vanishing of capital." Marx denied that the Biblical concepts of the family were in the best interest of society. His ideal was to switch the "cultural center of gravity" from the home to public institutions. Breaking up the family was not just incidental to his plans; it was a central part of the plan. "As long as the family unit remains strong and retains its cultural independence," he said, "the state cannot claim complete supremacy."

It is interesting to note, however, that the communists tried and then rejected the philosophy of Marx concerning the family. At first they made divorce easy and sexual promiscuity was encouraged. Mothers were taken from homes and placed in labor groups while children became wards of the state. Soon, however, they found that the state was endangered and they swung back to the necessity of strong family ties--though certainly apart from Christian concepts. Because I believe that the Christian family is the answer to many, if not most, of our modern day problems, I would like to note some of the characteristics of the Christian home.

Characteristics

- (1) A family that is truly Christian is Christ-like, which means that its members will treat each other as each would like to be treated. Christ taught this in Matt. 7:12, "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." While Jesus commanded this for all relationships, it certainly would have special bearing within a Christian family.
- (2) To each member of the family the acceptance of Christ (being a Christian) will serve as a foundation on which the home is built. When I perform a marriage ceremony for two fine young Christians, I read several passages from the scriptures. At the end of the reading, I often say, "May the Lord bless this reading of his word. May the truths found in this Book be the foundation upon which you establish your home this night." I know of no other foundation for a home to compare with the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.
- (3) The Christian family will worship together in public and in private. It is an inspiring thing to see families sitting together in public worship. Father, mother, and the children singing and praying and listening make a most heartwarming sight. It is also true that Christian families will read the scriptures and discuss spiritual truths in the home. What is more natural for them than to spend some time in study and prayer together in the home?
- (4) The Christian principles by which the family is governed will give each member the power "to see it through" regardless of outside pressures. Serious illness may become a great burden to a family. Separation, as when a husband must spend two or three years away during war time, is a burden. Financial stress is often present. The basic principles of the Christian faith, however, give a family the deep roots which are necessary to face any and all of these outside pressures and to see it through.
- (5) The Christian family shares every joy and blessing, as well as every burden and sorrow. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2). A family is a place where each member rejoices in the successes and triumphs of each other member, and also where each shares in the disappointments and sorrows of each other member. Each is deeply concerned for the good of the others. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote concerning our Lord's concern for his mother, "Even he that died for us upon the cross, in the last hour, in the unfathomable agony of death, was mindful of his mother,

as if to teach us that holy love should be our last worldly thought--the last point on earth from which the soul should take its flight for heaven." If Christ was so concerned for his mother's care, surely we should be concerned for the care of the members of our families.

- (6) The sense of belonging is a constant source of strength. Someone has said that loneliness is the most frightening feeling in the world. In a day when the population is ever increasing, it is a paradox that there is more loneliness than ever. The ties of love that bind a family together largely eliminate the feeling of loneliness.
- (7) The Christian father will not provoke his children to wrath, but will nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord. This charge was made by the apostle Paul to all Christian fathers in his letter to the Ephesians. (Eph.6:4)
- (8) The Christian son and daughter will obey their Parents in the Lord. (Eph. 6:1-3). Jesus reaffirmed the ancient law: "Honor thy father and thy mother." He strongly rebuked those scribes and Pharisees who sought loopholes in the law and ways of avoiding it. He said, "Ye have made void the word of God because of your traditions." (Matt. 15:5).
- (9) Open honesty and integrity, with a complete absence of the false front and hypocrisy, will characterize the Christian home, making possible complete confidence and trust. There is so much in the world that is artificial. So much is more sham and front. There is so much hypocrisy in the words and the actions of men. In the Christian home all of this is excluded. Here there must be complete honesty on the part of parents with children and children with parents.
- (10) Parents will take time from their adult responsibilities to listen to children and to try to see things through their children's eyes before making decisions. This is not to say that the children will make the decisions, but that parents will try to understand the feelings and needs of children and consider these, along with other factors which need to be considered, in making all decisions.
- (11) False, critical, malicious judgments should be avoided so as not to alienate members of the Christian family. In Matt. 7:1-3, Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"
- (12) Since grudge-bearing is not to be tolerated, even toward enemies, it stands to reason that forgiveness, peace, harmony and understanding will prevail in the Christian home. Christ taught his disciples, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you ... " Matt. 5:43-44). If Christ's disciples are to love their enemies and to pray for them, surely this means that the behavior within the family would be on an even higher level of love and respect.
- (13) Members of Christian families have a true sense of values. These values include such things as, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also." (Matt. 6:19-21). Also, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Cor. 4:18). Christians have a solid set of values by which to measure everything and by which to make their decisions.
- (14) Each, unlike those described by Paul as being "without understanding" (II Cor. 10:12), will know how to act in any situation. Because of the guidance and training in the home, children will know how to react to the temptations of the world about them. They will have understanding.
- (15) The attitude of each member toward life and his preparation for life will assure his success. At the end of his great Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock." (Matt. 7:24-25). Those who have been nurtured and grounded in the Christian faith from childhood up to maturity will have such attitudes, habits, and behavior patterns that they will be successful in relating to other people, in earning a living, and in all aspects of life.
- (16) Although the human element will remain in each, the Christian religion, being a religion of restraint, will enable the family, individually and collectively, to overcome evil with good rather than to be overcome of evil. Paul wrote to the Romans "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12: 21).
- (17) Younger members of the Christian family will not be enamored with conformity to the world (by which we mean sensual music, immodest dress, and rebellious behavior) because they have been transformed. Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:1-2).

- (18) In these days of drug use and sexual permissiveness, the Christian boy or girl will “abstain from the very appearance of evil” or “from every form of evil.” (I Thess. 5:22).
- (19) In an age of civil disobedience Christians make the best citizens. To the Romans Paul wrote, “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God, and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment.” (Rom. 13:1-2).
- (20) The Christian family shares one of life’s greatest commodities--hope--the hope of sharing eternal life in heaven with the Lord. Hope is “the anchor of the soul ... sure and stedfast.” (Heb. 6:19).

More Christian Homes

The alarming problems of our day can best be solved by more Christian homes and by homes that are more Christian. Recently a rather mature man sat in my office and told me, “It is my conviction that most of today’s problems can be traced to the breakdown of the home.” Perhaps this is true, though I personally prefer not to blame the home for all these failures. Certainly we ought to take into consideration the fact that the home has been bombarded with many outside pressures during our generation. It is true that home seems often to have been unprepared to cope with some of the pressures that have weakened its power for good. While our concern is not so much to apportion blame properly, it is our conviction that the answer to most of today’s problems lies within the home. If there is to be any solution to the many hurtful trends in the world today, these solutions must be found in better, more fully Christian homes.

This is not to say that the home is more important than the church, for we know full well that salvation is only in Christ and in his church. What it is to say, however, is that when young people grow up in homes where there is no respect for religion, and where every kind of evil attitude and act is present, the church will never get a hearing. If Christ is to be heard, it will be because parents themselves are concerned about the Lord and his way of life. Then, it is likely that the children will also be concerned. It is for this reason that we feel that the home occupies so central and so crucially important a role in modern society.

Conclusion

Many years ago the noted preacher Andrew H. Blackwood preached a sermon on “The Heritage of Our Children.” He made three main points: (1) The Heritage of Happy Memories. (2) The Heritage of Good Habits. (3) The Heritage of Lofty Ideals. Happy memories, good habits, and lofty ideals are goals toward which all of us should work in our homes.

Homecoming is one of life’s greatest blessings. “The best part of a vacation is arriving safe at home” we often say. When young people who are off at school come home it is a happy occasion. When husbands who are away on business come home there is rejoicing. Especially when a boy who has been away in military service comes home, there is great rejoicing. But the greatest homecoming of all will be when the spirit of man returns to God who gave it. How sweet it will be to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt. 25:21). In order to rejoice then in that greatest of all homecomings, we must accept Christ now. It is if we are Christians, that we can be counted members of God’s family and look forward to that greatest of all homecomings. Will you accept Christ’s invitation now to become part of his family and to look forward to this great event?