

THE CHRISTIAN HOME¹

by Wilhelm W. Petersen

Introduction

One of the dearest words in our vocabulary is “home.” The young man and woman anticipating marriage anxiously look forward to the day when they can establish their own home. Home is a place where children feel secure and wanted. Those away from home harbor pleasant thoughts and fond memories of the place where they were born and reared. The soldier on the battlefield longs for the day when he can come home and be restored to the family circle. Little children barge excitedly into the home at the end of the school day to make known their requests and to tell of their experiences.

The famous preacher Spurgeon has given this description of the home: “The word ‘home’ always sounds like poetry to me. It rings like a peal of bells at a wedding, only more soft and sweet, and it chimes deeper into the ears of my heart. It does not matter whether it means thatched cottage or manor house, home is home, be it ever so homely, and there’s no place on earth like it.”

Much has been said and written about the home! Famous people, poets and statesmen, have written and uttered striking statements about the home and its importance to society. Imagine a world without homes! But as Bible-believing Christians, we know that the home is a divine institution created by God Himself in the garden of Eden when He brought Adam and Eve together. It is His will that homes be established also today. His Son Jesus revealed Himself to be a Friend of the home by gracing the wedding at Cana with His presence, and by choosing this place to perform His first miracle. And during His earthly sojourn He was often a guest in the homes of His followers.

It is Christ’s presence that makes the Christian home. He is the Head of the Christian home, the unseen guest, the wise counselor, the silent listener. In the Christian home His Gospel is heard and followed, loved and respected. The Christian home is really a miniature church. It is also in such a home that Christ dwells with His blessings.

God’s providence and mercy rise with every morning sun upon the homes of His people. True, the Christian home also has its trials and sorrows. Sin finds its way into every home, including the Christian home. Satan, the enemy of the home, is hard at work to destroy the Christian home. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings help and deliverance when it is given a place in the home.

Let us maintain the Christian home among us by a simple trust in the Savior, and then it will be a peaceful haven of hope and happiness!

O Lord, we come before Thy face;
In every home, bestow Thy grace
On children, father, mother;

¹ This article was printed in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 51, nos. 2-3 (June-September 2011): 247-254.

Relieve their wants, their burdens ease,
Let them together dwell in peace
And love to one another! (ELH 189:4)

Parents in the Home

The Bible has much to say to the parents in the home. And parents who are truly concerned about establishing and maintaining a Christian home will heed the wise counsel of their Lord.

According to God's order, the father is to be the head of the house. As such, he has the responsibility of making the important decisions in the home, of providing for the needs of the family, and of carrying out much of the discipline. Where the father shirks these God-given responsibilities, the consequences can most certainly be tragic.

Judge Samuel Leibowitz, senior judge of Brooklyn's highest criminal court, recently wrote an article entitled, "Nine Words That Can Stop Juvenile Delinquency." Drawing upon his long experience as a judge, he stated that those nine words are: Put father back at the head of the house. God in His wisdom knows what He is talking about when He says that the father is to be the head of the house.

The wife and mother, on the other hand, are to occupy a subordinate position in the home. We realize that this is not always so popular in our day, but God's word has not changed. And His word says: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:22). In this regard Sarah, Abraham's wife, is held up as a model example for all wives to follow. We read that "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Peter 3:6). We can well imagine that it was not easy for Sarah to leave her friends and relatives (perhaps never to see them again) and to go with her husband to a strange land, but, realizing her subordinate position and trusting in the Lord's promise, she obeyed.

However, when God says that a woman is to be in subjection to her husband, that certainly does not mean that the husband is to make impossible demands on his wife and treat her like a slave. No, husbands are to dwell with their wives with understand, giving honor as to the weaker vessel, remembering always that she is a joint heir of grace (cf. 1 Peter 3:7).

While Christian parents always seek to do the will of their heavenly Father, they will at times not live up to God's requirements. For Christian parents, too, have sinful flesh which, at times gives way to temper, impatience, and harsh words. But they will confess their faults to one another and will always ask God's forgiveness. And, after all, seeking and receiving Christ's forgiveness makes a Christian home.

In Christian home where man and wife
Together lead a godly life,
By deeds their faith confessing,
There many a happy day is spent;
There Jesus gladly will consent
To tarry with His blessing. (ELH 189:1)

Children in the Home

One of the reasons God has established marriage is to bring children into the world. We read in the book of Genesis: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth"" (Genesis 1:28). Christian parents, then, will regard their children as gifts of God, and will consider them as being an heritage of the Lord.

In the previous section we were shown from the Scriptures what God would have us know about the parents in the home. In this section we shall see what God has to say to children. St. Paul, writing by divine inspiration, says to children: "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2-3). Again: "Let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God" (1 Timothy 5:4). The honor which children owe their parents is that they recognize them as God's representatives, and that they gladly submit themselves to the will of their parents, and hold them in love and esteem. This is well-pleasing unto the Lord, and has His promise of blessing.

Jesus grew up and developed like any normal child. And while the Bible is silent about much of His childhood, we do know that He "was subject" unto His parents (cf. Luke 2:51). He submitted to their will. And later, on the cross, He showed His concern for aged Mary when He gave instructions to John to care for her. John took her into his home and provided her with a living. Yes, He who has kept the Fourth Commandment for us has also left us an example to follow in this regard!

Joseph, the son of Jacob, is another who has left for us an example in the matter of obeying and honoring parents. He provided for his father by giving him the best of the land in Egypt. "Then Joseph provided his father" (Genesis 47:11). Joseph certainly experienced the promise of blessing from the Lord.

Just as the Lord promises to bless those who honor their parents, so He also speaks words of warning to those who despise their parents. To such He says: "The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it" (Proverbs 30:17). Harsh words, yes, but who of us dare say they are too harsh when spoken by the mouth of God Himself?

Children, realize that it is your duty to help make the kind of home in which the presence of Jesus is always welcome, and where the blessings of His mercy can be richly enjoyed!

Blest such a home, it prospers well,
In peace and joy the parents dwell,
And in their children's lot is shown
How richly God will bless His own. (ELH 190:4)

Instruction in the Home

Parents have no greater responsibility in the rearing of children than that they instruct them in the One Thing Needful. To fathers St. Paul writes: "Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Stating it negatively, the same apostle says: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Martin Luther once said that "parents cannot earn hell more easily than by neglecting to give their children a Christian training."

Christian parents are often tempted to think that if they send their children to Sunday School, then they have fulfilled their duty with regard to the instruction of their children. Surely, a Christian parent will want to make use of these agencies which the church offers for the feeding of its lambs, but what God told Moses to tell the parents of his day applies to parents also today: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, *and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). From this we learn that the religious instruction of our children is not to be a hit-or-miss affair, but a constant and daily thing *in the home*.

In a truly Christian home it will not be uncommon to see the family gathered around the table after a meal, with the father, or another member of the family, reading a section from the Bible or a devotional book. In such homes mother will be seen reading a Bible story to her little ones at bedtime, and teaching them to pray. Fortunate are those children that are brought up in such an atmosphere! To be pitied, truly pitied, are those children who never hear God's name mentioned in the home, except perhaps in cursing.

Parents should also remember that a very important part of instruction in the home is the setting of a good Christian example. For this is after all the most effective teacher of all. Someone has said that "example is the school of mankind, and they will learn at none other." Children are very sensitive and can easily discern the sincerity, or insincerity, of the parent. A parent can preach to his child until he is blue in the face, but if this is not backed up with a proper example, the preaching will be of little value.

When parents train up their children in the way they should go, both by word and deed, they have God's promise: "And when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Only eternity will reveal the many souls that have entered the joy of heaven because of the Christian instruction they received in the home.

Let Thy holy word instruct us;
Guide us daily by its light;
Let Thy love and grace constrain us
To approve whate'er is right,
Take Thine easy yoke, and wear it,
Strengthened with Thy heavenly might. (LHy 575:4)

Sorrow in the Home

While a Christian home is a happy one, even such a home will have its sorrows and hardships. Christians are not exempt from trials and tribulations. Even the godly must bear the consequences of sin. When our first parents fell into sin God said to Eve: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow... in pain you shall bring forth children." And to Adam the Lord said: "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:16-17).

So we must not think it is strange when Christian homes today, too, experience bitter disappointments such as sickness, crop failures, unfaithfulness on the part of husband or wife, the waywardness of a son or daughter, loss of job, destruction of property, and death snatching a loved one from the family circle. Jesus has forewarned His followers: "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). St. Peter writes: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Peter 4:12).

We should recognize these afflictions as coming from the Lord, and in faith believe that He has good reasons for permitting them to come into our lives. "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6). He sends these sorrows into Christian lives not to punish, but to correct. God uses afflictions to strengthen Christians in their faith, and to draw them closer to Him. Luther says that "all trials have this purpose, that although they seem to tear us away from Christ, they unite us more intimately with Him." Again Peter writes: "That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

The sorrows that God sends into our lives are often blessings in disguise. Sorrows often work to bring a family closer together; husband and wife may learn to appreciate each other more, and children learn to assume responsibilities. We are not going too far when we say that if it were not for the sorrows which God sends into His homes, there would be much more ingratitude and unhappiness. It has been said that "the crushing sorrow is often the key that opens the door of God's treasure-house."

Some day we will also thank God for the sorrows which He permitted to come into our homes. Though sorrow in the home appears to us to be grievous now, "nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). In our heavenly home we shall understand God's purposes in afflicting the Christian home on earth, and we shall thank Him for it!

All trials are then like a dream that is past,
Forgotten all trouble and sorrow;
All questions and doubts have been answered at last;
Then dawneth eternity's morrow.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus! (ELH 200:6)

The Christian Home - A Prelude to the Heavenly Home

A truth that the Bible seeks to impress upon us throughout is that we are only pilgrims and strangers in this world. Our life here is only a temporary arrangement. When Jacob was asked by King Pharaoh how old he was, Jacob answered: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years" (Genesis 47:9). St. Peter writes: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). And the writer of the book of Hebrews says: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

The members of a Christian family are guided by this truth. They know that even though their earthly house shall some day be dissolved, yet they have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. A Christian family can therefore face the fact of earthly separation, knowing that there shall be a glorious reunion in the heavenly home, a reunion that will be permanent, free from sorrow, sickness, and hardship, the things which so often characterized life here on earth. The Christian family believes this because Christ our Savior has promised: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). Thus with Luther we can pray: "O heavenly Father, if I let this body depart, I am certain that I shall be with Thee forever."

The writer of these lines on the Christian home will never forget a hymn which was sung in his home every Sunday evening:

Jesus, still lead on,
Till our rest be won!
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow, calm and fearless;
Guide us by Thy hand
To our fatherland!

Jesus, still lead on,
Till our rest be won!
Heavenly Leader, still direct us,
Still support, console, protect us,
Till we safely stand
In our fatherland! (ELH 587:1,4)

May that hymn be the simple prayer of all our Christian homes! Then, when the time comes to leave our earthly home, we shall be gathered in our heavenly home, where faith shall give way to sight, and prayers to eternal songs and praise.