

## **Dynamic Christian Living**

by

Harold L. Lundquist

Copyright @ 1943

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan

### **CHAPTER SIX -**

#### **Things That Mar Family Life**

**"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God in not keeping his commandments"**

(Deuteronomy 8:11)

HOME is what you make it! That is the important truth we want to keep before us as we think of the things that mar family life.

There are circumstances which hinder us from doing what we would like to do-such as poverty, illness, unemployment, etc. For instance, some of us were very much shocked during the war to read in our magazines of the manner in which children were cared for in trailer camps and in other places where those carrying on defense work were living. We read of children who would spend all day alone - chained to a trailer so that they could play, go in and out, and obtain food. Even worse was the story of a mother who, when she and her husband both went off to work, left two little children inside of a car to remain there all day. Conditions have improved since then but are still far from ideal.

We may not be able to control all of the circumstances under which we live, and certainly they do have a bearing on the home life, but man or woman when of the right spirit can in a large measure triumph over such matters. Circumstances can be overcome and we can make even the poorest home a gateway to Heaven. It is so often and so much a matter of the attitude of the heart and mind - the spirit of the parents and of the children.

Many there are who will recall the humble homes in which they were reared. There even the common necessities of life were often lacking but nevertheless love and the right attitude toward one another made the home like a little bit of Heaven, something which we may miss in the midst of plenty and luxury.

Whatever our circumstances may be, we can and must turn away from all known sin - and in this case we are thinking of the sins which hinder the home from being what it ought to be. GOD has provided for victory over sin through CHRIST for all who believe in Him. We must appropriate it by faith.

First we find one of the great enemies of the home and one of the things which frequently mars family life, namely

## I. Deceit (Genesis 27:30-35)

Whatever the circumstances of the home may be, there surely can be absolute honesty and candor in the dealings between members of the family.

Deceit is particularly reprehensible and destructive at the beginning of married life. I recall a home which according to all the ordinary standards of judgments, should have been a happy and useful one. While there was no great wealth, there was enough. The children were many but all capable, intelligent and reasonably obedient. There was, however, a constant undercurrent of distress and strife in that home and it all dated back to a falsehood which was told before marriage. The mother in that home was a Christian and for a long time was unwilling to marry the father because he was not a Christian. Then in order to obtain her consent he feigned faith in CHRIST. He kept up the show until after marriage when he renounced it all. For nearly fifty years the home was in turmoil more than half the time.

Young people do well to carefully scrutinize any sudden professions of piety or reform in any such situation, for deceit can never be foundation for true happiness. Let no emotion or affection warp good judgment in evaluating such professed conversions. Be sure or you will be sorry.

We recall in the story of Jacob and Esau the sad consequences of the deceit practiced by Jacob and his mother in defrauding Esau. Many elements entered into that situation - the favoritism of the mother toward one son, the envy that the brother had of his elder brother's birthright, the wicked scheming of mother and son to outwit the aged father - all a very distressing picture of a home-life shot through with deceitfulness. To build anything of permanent value on such a foundation was quite impossible. That was why Jacob went through such a thorough course of instruction in humility and honesty before GOD could bless him.

It is disturbing, indeed, to have to say that such scheming on the part of members of a family is still going on even among professing Christian people. It is to be regretted that in many a home it is true that children learn that the way to obtain their desires is to win the interest of the mother and with her work out some scheme for improperly winning the consent of the father.

Do not misunderstand me. I fully realize that the mother has a place in the home which brings her in close touch with the children, and gives her a sympathetic viewpoint which may not always be true of the father who may be burdened by many outside responsibilities. There certainly is no harm in the innocent fun of mother and the children exercising their ingenuity to convince father, yes, sometimes against his will. Being a father I know that the judgment of the man of the house in some family matters needs adjustment, much as I regret the need of making such a confession. If it can be done painlessly, so much the better.

But certainly no such condition should be permitted to go on to the point where children are taught to ignore or learn or distrust their father. They must not come into the custom of seeking special favor through some scheme worked out with the mother. That is a treacherous approach and one which we need to avoid like the plague, if we do not wish to undermine family life.

The antidote for all of this is absolute honesty in the home and between all members of the

family. This will build up a confidence which will make the various individuals in the family group trust one another, come what may. In times of crisis (and they come to every family sooner or later) it is the assurance of honest dealing which makes it possible for the individual members to be truly helpful to one another.

Therefore the family in which deceitful means are used by husband or wife to gain some advantage for self or a favored child is heading for the rocks and needs to turn about and get into the channel of truth and uprightness before it is too late. Family life tends to drift, and like everything else in this world, the drift seems to be downward. Now and then we need to stop and take inventory, just as the storekeeper or factory manager has to determine what may be the condition of his business. Having done that we ought then to make readjustments.

It may be a good time right now for your family to investigate and if necessary to overhaul family relationships. The family is certainly more important than your car. I have no doubt that many of you regularly bring your automobile into the garage to have a check-up, to have adjustments made, to have the oil changed, etc. Why do you do it? To protect your investment and to make it possible for the automobile to serve you. Surely we should give just as much attention to family relationship, and if necessary make changes which will bring the family life into proper working order. One thing which we can entirely eliminate is deceit. Let's get rid of it!

A second thing which hinders family life is

## **II. Divorce (Matthew 5:31, 32)**

One of the most destructive elements in modern life is divorce. Terrifying statistics could be quoted, but they are not nearly as moving as the knowledge most of us have of broken homes, delinquent children, decaying morals, etc. The victims of this deadly divorce evil are primarily the children who are almost always sent on, into life with disordered minds, hearts and lives. Official statistics for 1946 indicate that 70 per cent of the boys and girls who are arrested by the police come from homes where divorce has come in to break up the home.

How prevalent that situation is in life in general might astonish some folk. For example, I know that among the splendid Christian young people who come into my classes to prepare for Christian service those who have greatest difficulty are those who come from divided homes, homes where divorce has entered. Here are fine young people, thoroughly converted, eager to do the Lord's work, and ready for the instruction they receive in the Institute. But the disturbing conditions of home life leave them distraught and continue to so trouble them in their daily life that they are upset physically, mentally and spiritually. You will agree that this is a real hindrance to effective living, a drag on Christian service.

Dr. Walter Maier, referred several years ago to the fact that the previous year there had been 200,000 decrees of divorce in America. (Doubtless that record is way out of date now. In 1945 the city of Chicago had one divorce for every three marriages, and it is expected that the ratio will soon be one to two - or may even reach one to one - a divorce for every marriage!) He asked why such a condition could exist and went on to say, "What is it that our nation is being inundated by a flood wave of juvenile crime and that our enlarged prisons are being filled with youthful criminals?"

Why is it that the police radios of our country daily broadcast the names of hundreds of missing young men and women? Why is it that there is such a rude disregard for the requirements of purity and chastity on the part of young people that even newspaper writers are beginning to throw up their hands in horror? Is not all this finally to be traced to the ugly power of sin and to the fact that many homes calloused and stolidly indifferent because of cold commercialism and endless pleasure-seeking have crowded out CHRIST?"

Divorce is not the casual breaking of a legal relationship which has become irksome. It is a terrible thing and carries in its wake dreadful results in the lives of both parents and children.

JESUS declared that the decree of divorcement allowed by Moses was not an abrogation of GOD's original law in this matter. Because of the "**hardness of your heart**" (Mark 10:4-5) Moses permitted it, but the standard of GOD was and (note this please!) is unchanged.

Marriage, as we saw in a previous chapter, is GOD's plan for the perfect union of the man and woman whereby the two become one in the sight of GOD. That means that the tie is not one to be dissolved at will or on some purely legal ground; it is an inseparable union.

The only exception recognized by Scripture (v. 32) is that act of sexual unfaithfulness which is such a breach of the holy union as to virtually destroy it. Perhaps it might better be called a recognition of the breaking of the union rather than an exception. Adultery is a heinous sin, an extremely serious violation of GOD's law, a break of the marriage relationship. Let us press that fact home today when it is so lightly regarded by our sinful generation.

Having said these things about divorce and its dreadful influence on family life, it is only fair to balance the picture up a bit by giving a word of approval to the many homes where divorce is an absolutely unthought of possibility. It is true that divorce news finds a place of prominence in the press whereas the good news of the thousands and thousands who live happily together (or who go through with what turned out to be a bad bargain) is not of interest to the writers of the headlines.

Not all the homes of this great nation nor of the great people of this nation are broken up through divorce. The story is told of how a wealthy businessman in Detroit came into the Detroit Athletic Club and said to Mr. Hughes, the secretary, "Is it true that Eddie Guest is getting a divorce?" "Of course it isn't true! That just couldn't happen," replied Mr. Hughes. "Well, I'm glad to hear that," said the businessman, "for my wife heard it on the train the other day and she cried all night long." It seemed to this woman that it would be impossible that the one who had written the well-known verse, "It takes a heap o' livin' in a house to make it home," could have thought of divorce.

We thank God for everyone who takes the right attitude toward marriage. We can do nothing more helpful than to put into the thinking of our young people a proper understanding of this entire matter of home, and family relationships.

Not only does deceit destroy a home and divorce break up its healthy and powerful influence, but we have one more dangerous element to consider, namely

### III. Desire (Luke 12:13-15)

Money is necessary and may be a blessing, but remember the solemn words of Scripture which declares that the **"love of money is the root of all evil"** (I Timothy 6:10) That is not just a verse in the Bible. It is the true picture of the deadly thing which has destroyed the happiness and usefulness of millions.

Money may be a hindrance rather than a help. We read somewhere of the American millionaire who, having been born a poor boy and having made money, also made it his idol. He was showing a Quaker around his beautiful home and grounds. He exclaimed, "And the almighty dollar has done it all. What cannot money do?" "Ah, my friend," replied the Quaker, "thou remindest me of the Israelites who worshipped the golden calf, saying that it had brought them out of the land of Egypt. In reality it hindered rather than helped them in their journey to the promised land. Maybe thy dollars will do the same for thee."

Material prosperity and the resulting luxury which is so common in our country - is far from a blessing to us. It was not an idle use of words by Livy when he said, "Avarice and luxury are the pests which have ever been the ruin of every good state."

Prosperity has ruined many a life while adversity has sent many a soul back to seek and to find GOD. One is deeply disturbed to see a destructive prosperity as it repeatedly runs true to form. As these words are written it is encouraging our nation to become careless in the matter of morals, weak where it should be strong, and selfish where it should be self-sacrificing.

Here in our lesson text there was a quarrel over an inheritance. In meeting it our Lord laid down a principle which will solve all the money quarrels in every home - and they are endless in number and great in bitter destructiveness. What is the answer? An understanding that **"Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."** (v. 15). Write it large in the minds and hearts of the boys and girls in our homes! Let it control in the attitude of Father and Mother toward their earthly possessions. That will solve not only the money problems of the home, but will send the children forth into life with a foundation philosophy which will bless them to the end of their days.

It is important that we properly instruct our children about money. It is a difficult thing to do in a time when money has, to a large extent, lost its real value. Certain lines of employment receive rich returns while others, especially so-called "white collar" workers, have limited incomes and increased living costs. So it seems that the best thing to do with money now is to spend it quickly and get value received rather than hold on to it with the possibility that it will be taken away in taxes or in some other way.

Under the circumstances children are apt to become rebellious if their home happens to be short of money or when they are unable to buy the things that other children have.

It takes tactful handling to give them the proper attitude toward money and to keep alive in these strange days the virtue of thrift.

It seems as though these times have put upon parents so many extra obligations that we almost envy our friends who reared children back in the days of normalcy. But while the burdens are heavy, it is at the same time a thrilling experience to help a young person through some of the unusual circumstances of a troubled time.

It's the greatest game in the world, if I may put it that way, and one to which we as parents ought to give our most earnest attention. One of the things, as we have already suggested, which we must teach them is to use money with care but at the same time to let it set rather easily in their thinking lest they become enamoured of money for its own sake.

Notice verse 14. It is the desire for money that most often makes man want to be a judge over his brother. The big eyes of envy cause him to look with bitter desire upon what his brother has and he wants. The fine principle of sharing the family's possessions would do much to knit the home into a unit - happy, strong and useful to both GOD and man. The point is to say "ours" rather than "mine," and to ask, "What can we do?" not, "What can I get?" Easy to do? No - certainly not, but possible, and worth trying, too.

The right heart attitude in such matters is beautifully illustrated by a story which came out of the last world war.

A wounded English soldier was about to leave the hospital and was talking with the chaplain before he went. The chaplain made some comment about his injuries. He said, "You have been hurt." "Yes, sir," said the young man, "but, thank GOD, I'm alive. I'm going home without my right hand but my mother will be glad to have what is left of me." "Yes, I'm sure of that," answered the chaplain, "Shall I write to her before you go home to tell her that you've lost your right hand?" The boy looked up quickly at the chaplain and said, "I did not lose it, sir, I gave it."

Such was the fine, loyal attitude of the young men and women toward their country in time of war and such should be the fine, loyal spirit of members of the family toward one another: to give rather than to reluctantly have something taken away from us, to give rather than to lose something, to give of self and substance and time and interest for the family.

We stress once more the fact that it is the parents in the home who set the example which determines the attitude of the children. This leads us to suggest that the mother who is not in the home is not in a position to make any real contribution in this vital matter.

We have the sacrificial mother who must give herself to daily labor that a fatherless family may have its daily food, or to take the place of a bread-winner who is ill or disabled.

One fears, however, that such is not the reason for the unwillingness of many modern women to take their God-ordained place in the home.

There can be no doubt that the Scriptures teach that a woman's place is with her family in her home, always provided that GOD has not definitely called her into another place of service. The home is the very basis of our civilization and once it is broken up the whole structure automatically breaks down.

The home is essentially a personal thing and woman finds her true sphere of activity there

because her ambitions and interests are also essentially personal, in fact, too personal to permit her to ordinarily make the best kind of public servant.

Why, then do many women prefer to work outside of the home? The reason roots back into that to which we have already made reference, namely, a consuming desire for life's luxuries. We face here a problem with many ramifications and of serious proportions, raising not only moral questions, but involving social and financial maladjustments.

Fifteen or twenty years ago it was the almost universal custom for a girl in business to give up her position when she married and establish a home. Now she frequently keeps her work, with the result that she and her husband jointly earn a salary in excess of their needs. This enables them to buy many luxuries, which, in turn, establishes an artificially high standard of living for the entire social circle in which they move. Great then becomes the distress of the neighbors and acquaintances who, in spite of everything, must try to "keep up with the Joneses." - all on one man's pay check.

Another serious result of the employment of married women is that others who must have employment may be needlessly hindered from obtaining it. The man who has a family to support, the widowed mother with children to care for, or the woman whose husband has been stricken by disabling illness must not only compete with a married woman for a position, but must do so at a great disadvantage. She, knowing that her husband's income will care for the family's needs, is able to work for less because her salary is after all luxury money. The double burden thus thrust upon the worthy one seeking employment creates a vicious circle which is far reaching in its sinister influence.

However, the most important phase of the problem is that which we have already stressed. One wonders whether such employment is not often a deterrent to the God-appointed purpose of having children in the home. If so, it is tragic. Social workers agree with Scripture which teaches that children are the crown of the home. And then we have the serious fact that home-life is usually ruined and children already in the home are compelled to live without proper parental love and control at a time when they need it most.

Child crime and immorality, we repeat, constitute a present-day problem that is positively staggering. The statistics of our courts establish that beyond question. The decay of home life is widely recognized as primarily responsible for this condition.

These are all serious matters, worthy of our prayerful and unprejudiced consideration. If what has been said in the paragraph above points to a failure in our own lives or in our home lives, let us not resent being reminded of it but rather rejoice in the opportunity of repentance, renewal and right living in the days ahead.

We have seen some of the things that mar family life. How sad they are to contemplate. Now we have a more pleasant prospect for we shall consider together in our next chapter those things which strengthen family life.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

\*\*\*