

Dynamic Christian Living

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN -

Things That Strengthen Family Life

"Charity [Love] never faileth. (I Corinthians 13:8)

IN the previous chapter we studied the things that mar family life. That was the negative approach, and we did not enjoy it too well. Necessary, yes, but not too pleasant. The word "don't" is often needed as an admonition within the family but, it is always far less encouraging and constructive than the word "do". The nature of things in this world makes prohibitions and negatives necessary, but we should counter-balance them with the positive and the active. Especially is that true in the life of the home.

Many of us remember the old story with the very helpful lesson about the mother who discovered her little child playing with a sharp scissors. Those of us who have reared children know what a serious matter such a thing can be. I have a friend who has a grown son who has only one eye because of just such a situation. The mother was thoroughly frightened and tried to get the child to surrender the scissors. She knew it would not do to be too persistent. When the child refused, the mother turned to the table where there was a bowl of fruit and taking a bright attractive orange, she held it out to the little girl. Promptly the little fingers released the scissors and took the orange.

It was what someone has called the expulsive power of a new affection. It was also a very skillful use of psychology on the part of the mother who substituted the operation of an active positive desire for what would have otherwise been a negative command. Instead of demanding the scissors, she got the child to take something which was more appealing and not harmful.

We need to cultivate the ability to do this with our grown up children as well as the little ones. That is why we turn now to consider those things which give strength to the home and to daily life. This is a lesson much needed when, so much of our normal home life is out of joint.

We begin at the right place when we say that there must be a

I. Recognition of GOD in the Home (Exodus 2:1-4; Joshua 24:14, 15)

Failure at this point is without question the great mistake of our day. Christianity touches every phase of life, but nowhere is its blessed influence of greater importance than in the home. There

it gives the proper foundation for a right evaluation of marriage, which we saw in Chapter Four to be the foundation of the family. It also provides the proper atmosphere for the home, creating a right spirit in its relationships and providing a solution for its problems.

Recognition of GOD in the home may be accomplished in these two ways.

A. By faith in GOD (Exodus 2:1-4)

The story of the birth of the babe who was called Moses, who became possibly the greatest civic and religious leader of all time, is a most interesting one. In this little new-born boy the destinies of the Hebrew people, (yes, of all of us) were greatly involved. If there had been no Moses, one wonders how the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt would have taken place and how Israel would have been carried forward under the plan of GOD up to the time of the coming of our Redeemer through that race. This was an important baby.

A boy is always a mighty important person and is entitled to our careful attention. We never know what apparently incidental touch on a boy's life will result in great future blessing and usefulness.

I recall an incident which took place in the west years ago.

There were two boys in the family, an older and a younger one. The older one fell dangerously ill and the father galloped away across the prairie to get the nearest doctor, twenty miles away. When the doctor came and walked into the little log house the younger boy, desperately worried about his older brother whom he almost worshipped, crept in and hid himself behind a big chair. He watched the worried faces of his father and mother as the doctor began to examine the sick boy. Finally after what seemed like an eternity of waiting, the doctor straightened up and said, "Your son is a very sick boy, but in a few weeks I believe we will have him all right again."

From behind the big chair the small brother saw the worried lines of his parents' faces relax into smiles of hope and relief. That small boy said to himself, "When I grow up, I'm going to be able to do that. I'm going to make other fathers and mothers happy." That young man, working against terrific odds, gained his degree in medicine and became one of America's leading physicians, an outstanding authority on that greatly feared disease of childhood, infantile paralysis.

How blind we sometimes are to the real values in life. A whole row of young people had stood to be received into the church. After the service the pastor said to one of the trustees of the church, "Wasn't that a splendid sight?" "Yes" he replied "I suppose it was; but as I sized up the whole row there wasn't five dollars in the lot."

That was probably true - but what did the future hold? One young boy, none too promising in his early school work, grew up to be the President of the State Normal School, and a leader for CHRIST; one young woman of the group became head of a training school for young women; one of the boys later gave \$5,000 when the new church' was built.

They were worth-while, weren't they?

We tell these stories to remind ourselves that no one knows what's in a boy - a baby boy, a little boy, or a big boy. We must be careful with our boys (even as we are with our girls), for in them is our hope for the future of our families, of our churches, yes, of the world.

By the time of the birth of Moses, the Jewish people who had hitherto found favor in the eyes of those Pharaohs who knew Joseph had come into suspicion and bondage as other Pharaoh's had taken the throne. These rulers were fearful of this Jewish people lest they should grow into a serious menace to Egypt.

One can understand their concern because here was a strange nation growing up within their own nation - a great group of foreigners. Yes, they might even have called them fifth-columnists if they had known modern terminology.

For example we have had the problem of knowing what to do with a great number of Japanese who were living in our land. Many of them, perhaps most of them, were loyal to America, yet it became necessary for our nation to make arrangements to keep them in a particular place lest some one among them betray us to the nation to which they formerly gave allegiance.

In order to protect themselves, the Pharaohs went to an awful and cruel extreme. They issued a decree that all boys were to be destroyed at birth. Here were Moses' parents faced with the awful fact that their precious baby boy was condemned to death. Did they weep in fear and despair?

No, they trusted GOD and sent the little one forth on a great venture of faith, the charming story of which follows the verses of our lesson.

GOD honored their faith by not only saving him, but by using their very enemies to serve them in rearing him to useful manhood. The Lord arranged things so that Moses' own mother was able to care for him and instruct him in the religious teaching of his forefathers even as he was receiving instruction in all the wisdom of Egypt. What an ironical, but interesting situation! GOD must have enjoyed His little "joke" on the Egyptians - if we may so express it.

We all need to learn the lesson of trusting GOD with our children. We talk about it as though it were easy to do and then we fail to do it. Someone has told of the mother whose husband was asked how she was. He replied, "Oh, she's quite well, but she's worried about her children. You see, she is quite sure that she can trust GOD for her own need, but she doesn't seem to be certain that He is able to take care of her children." I am afraid that a good many of us would have to plead guilty to that kind of unbelief. We trust GOD for ourselves and for our lifetime, and then lie awake nights worrying about what will become of our children in the years to come. God will be there then, too. Let us trust Him.

B. By Service for GOD (Joshua 24:14, 15)

Joshua, who followed Moses as the God-appointed leader of Israel, was giving his last admonition to his people. He knew how they had repeatedly turned from GOD in unbelief and sin; yes, that even now some were worshiping false gods, He pleads with them to turn in faith to the one true GOD. Notice that his plea is made effective by the declaration of the fact that he and

his house were serving the Lord.

Every man who holds a position of leadership in this world is responsible for the use of that place of influence and power, as a testimony for GOD. Now and then we hear of a high public official in our own land who loves and serves CHRIST in sincerity, and our hearts rejoice. The faith of a whole nation may thus be strengthened. Great names came out of World War II - of men who really believed in and trusted GOD - Dobbie, Montgomery, MacArthur, Eisenhower and others.

Especially weighty is the influence of a whole family thrown into devoted service for GOD; that is, not just in a profession of faith, or a formal allegiance to the church, but a real out-and-out life of devotion to CHRIST.

Such a family will present a consistent, steady testimony of the right kind. Irregularity and undependability in such a matter is fatal to such an influence.

Someone has illustrated the importance of consistency in life and testimony by pointing out that a compass is a very useful instrument in determining directions but unfortunately not all compasses are trustworthy. If the magnetic needle has lost its sensitiveness, or if other parts of the compass are not just what they should be, we may have an unsafe, in fact, a dangerous instrument.

A pastor was telling of a pocket knife which he had designed for use in camping. Among other things, it had a compass, but it did not work very well. One day he was turning it about, testing the compass which was evidently untrue to the magnetic pole. The needle gyrated in a most unexpected way without any apparent cause. A young man who was standing nearby and watching the needle said, "I should hate to be guided by that compass. It would never get a fellow home." A bad compass is worse than no compass at all.

Do you and I have the kind of home that points in the right direction, or have we as families lost our sensitivity to the Lord, letting things get between ourselves and Him so that we and our homes do not point men to GOD. Every one of us has a sphere of influence, and our family life counts for or against GOD in our own community and among our own friends. Which is it?

The members of a family that, recognizes GOD have a high

II. Regard for One Another in the Home (Ephesians 5:28-31; 6:1-4)

It is pure hypocrisy for the family to parade an outward show of religion which does not effectively touch the relationships within the home. Incidentally, it is the kind of hypocrisy which is strikingly ineffective - men see through it too easily. Certainly one does not fool the children in the home. Rather are they offended by our sham and turned away from the Lord.

It is with the family as it is with the human face which is as someone has said, the signature of the soul.

A well known writer tells that he had done a favor for a Boston portrait painter and in return the

painter had insisted on painting the man's portrait. He felt a little silly about sitting for hours in the studio to have his face painted but he found the time spent to be profitable for he learned many things. As the artist began to paint him, it became evident that he was not seeking a photographic likeness but was endeavoring to put into his painting the soul of his subject. He said he felt as though he were sitting there with all of the clothing of his soul off in a public place.

The artist said to him one day, "A man is what he is inside of his soul and he can't get away from it. You don't fool people, especially painters, about what you really are." We may apply that truth to the home. You don't fool very many people about what your home is if it is not what it ought to be. If it is not - why not make it right - now?

What then does Christianity do for the home itself? It determines, directs, sweetens - yes, glorifies the relation between

1. Husband and Wife. (Ephesians 5:28-31)

This passage puts marriage on the highest plane, comparing it to the relation between CHRIST and the Church. Thus marriage is to be recognized as the joining of man and wife in a sacred union which calls for love in its highest and noblest sense.

This means that the husband cherishes his wife as his own body, against which no man would do any harm. For it he makes every possible provision for its comfort, health, usefulness and attractiveness. That is the way every husband should feel about his wife (yes, and the wife about her husband). Most of us do even though we fail at times to show it as we should.

This means something in daily living. A well-known merchant had a placard nailed to the desk in his office. It said,

**"WHICH?"
Wife or Whiskey?
The babies or the bottle?
HEAVEN OR HELL?**

To the question of a visitor he replied, "I wrote that myself.

Some time ago I found myself falling into the habit of drinking an occasional glass with a friend. Soon my stomach got bad, my faculties dulled and I had a constant craving for stimulants. I saw tears in my wife's eyes and wonder on the faces of my children. One day I sat down and wrote that card. As I looked at it an awful revelation burst upon me like a flash. I nailed it there and read it many times that day. I went home sober that night and have not touched a drop since."

That man came to realize that he must treat his wife as his own personality or his own body. He must be as kind toward her as he would be toward himself. Such love between parents will lead the entire home life along in a serene, happy and wholesome way. It will not only double the joy, but will give twice the strength in the hour of sorrow, dividing the griefs and burdens of life.

It will set the pattern for the right relation between

2. Parents and Children. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

The first, and one might almost say the only, law of childhood is obedience. It is GOD's way to joy and a satisfying life experience for the child in the home. The command to obey carries with it the understanding that the parents are "**in the Lord.**" And what father or mother is competent to direct the life of a child apart from faith in CHRIST?

There is no more delightful experience than that of rearing a boy or girl - and none more difficult. It calls for all the wisdom, patience, persistence and tact that the best man or woman can muster, or acquire. And with it all we still find ourselves hopelessly deficient and helplessly involved. We need the help of GOD - nothing else will suffice. What then, if mother and father are not Christians, not on speaking terms with GOD - where shall they turn? Every father and mother ought to be a Christian - that's certain.

Observe that the parent has an obligation to deal intelligently and kindly with the child. We need a great deal of improvement, and instruction, perhaps admonition, at that point. That does not mean that we may not, or should not, exercise authority. For it is the testimony of experience that children do not find the greatest helpfulness in parents who fail to exercise proper authority. And the children know it, too.

The story is told of a young man who, writing home from college, expressed his gratitude to his father for his firmness in dealing with him as a boy. He wrote, "There was a time when I thought you were hard on me. I resented it and determined that when I was out from under the home roof I would go my own way.

Since I have been at college I have found that I have so many worthwhile things in my life which others do not have. I am writing now to thank you and to express my gratitude and to say that if I ever have a home of my own I want it to be like the one in which I grew up."

So we say again that authority which requires obedience is necessary and salutary but it can be wise and kind.

Above all, there is to be a divine nurture, a guiding of the tender child-life in the ways of GOD. Here is life's greatest opportunity and its mightiest challenge - yes, and its deepest responsibility.

"When you write on the heart of a child
No waters can wash it away.
The sands may shift when the billows are wild
And the efforts of time may decay,
Some stories may perish, some songs be forgot,
But this graven record, time changes it not.

"Whatever you write on the heart of a child,
A story of gladness or care,
That Heaven has blessed, or that earth has defiled

Will linger unchangeably there.
Who writes it has sealed it forever and aye;
He must answer to GOD on the great Judgment Day."

- Clarence E. Flynn

How surprising that fathers (and mothers) who are apparently looking for the greatest measure of usefulness to their generation fail to see it in the privilege they have to rear intelligent, godly children, who will bless not only this generation, but generations yet to come. Here is "big business" worthy of our best effort and attention!

What do we give it? Usually the last and the least of our attention.

Business, social engagements, work in the church - yes, even our own recreation and pleasure are allowed to come between us and the time we should give to our children. It is sheer folly - but still we do it!

When will we learn that our children are a heritage from the Lord and our richest possession?

~ end of chapter 7 ~
