

The Building of a Covenant Home

Building A Christian Home

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The scripture reading this morning is Psalm 127 and 128 and the text is the first part of Psalm 127:1. Psalm 127 and 128.

1 A Song of degrees for Solomon [or perhaps by Solomon]. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. 3 Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. 4 As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. 5 Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

1 Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. 2 For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. 3 Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. 4 Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. 5 The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. 6 Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

The text is. Psalm 127:1A, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, my experience as a Christian, and I'm sure for all of us, our experience as Christians is this: we have a continual need to get back to the basics. When it comes to doctrine, when it comes to holy living and when it comes to family life and home life, we always need to be going back to the basics, and I think that's true in a special way with regard to family life and home life. The world and the culture in which we live is warring in unrelenting warfare against the family and against the home. What we're seeing in our culture, a culture that's plunging further into darkness and iniquity, what we're seeing is an open and intentional attack on the home and the continual breakdown of home life, and it's having its effect on the church, and it's having its effect on God's people. There are many Christian homes that are profoundly,

spiritually weak, and they are at risk of tearing at the seams because God's people are not discerning the influence of the world in their own homes and families. In addition to the culture around us, there's our own sinful nature that's continually inclining us to shape our families according to our own specifications, according to our own tastes, molding them after our own fashion rather than according to God's word so that we begin to think that our children and our homes belong to us, as if my children and my home is my own possession rather than being the possession of my Lord. And we can easily forget the good standards that our godly forefathers, many of them, strove to maintain when it came to cultivating godliness in their homes, and it's so easy to become slack in maintaining a Christian home. In addition, maybe we say today this is the convenient excuse, life is just so busy. We're running here, we're running there. We're out with friends. We get caught up with the busyness of life and what happens is not only do we have that excuse, but we lose perspective because we are busy. We get caught up with the cares of the world in such a way that we begin to forget the basics of family worship and family piety. Family devotions easily go by the wayside for another day. Catechism memory work is forgotten for most of the week for another week. And we sometimes fail to see how the time that we have with our children to mold and shape their hearts, it is so quickly passing by. It will soon be over before you know it. And perhaps we know we say that there is no greater joy than to see our children walk in the truth but we don't always walk in harmony with those words, do we?

Well, as I begin ministering here at Grace PRC in earnest, one of the great desires and concerns that I have for this congregation is that the families and the homes that make up this church be truly molded and shaped after the instruction of God's word, that we have homes filled with piety and true religion, that we know the basics of family piety because a strong church comes from having strong homes. I'm confident also that the Lord will use preaching on the home and family to truly shape our lives because we never go away from the worship service unaffected. It will have its influence. And so we begin this morning a new series, a baptism series every time we have a baptism, Lord willing, a new series entitled "Building a Christian Home" where we're going to look at what God's word has to say about the home and family life and all the parts that make up the home. I personally am excited about this series. I'm excited not just for the church, but also for myself. My wife and I talked this past week and we observed again for the countless time again, that we need to get back to basics. We need to make some changes again. We've let some things slide. I've let some things slide as a husband and father and our children are growing up fast and we need to keep things so that the family is going in the right direction. So I'm excited about myself. I hope to be blessed by this series and my family, I hope my family is blessed, and I hope as a congregation we are blessed together. This morning, we have an introductory sermon that's really going to set the stage and the foundation for how we approach the building of a home. We take as our theme "The Building of a Covenant Home" and we look, first, at the home to be built; second, we look at the building of that home; and then third, we look at the blessings and joy.

Psalm 27:1 says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." The verse speaks there about the building of a house. Now when the scriptures, especially the Old Testament, speaks about a house, what it especially has in mind is not the

physical structure that you might build with your hands with two by fours and with lumber, but it's talking about the home. It's talking about the family that lives in that structure and the members that make up the home, the family. The reference here is to the home and that's clear from the Psalm itself and from Psalm 128, the Psalm, Psalm 127 talks about children, about home life. Psalm 128 also talks about the wife and the children like olive plants round about your table. The reference here is to a home, "Except the LORD build the home, they labour in vain that build it." There is a big difference between a house and a home. What is important is not the kind of house you live in and the quality of your house, what is important is the kind of home you live in and the quality of your home life. There are many houses that are big and expensive but they're not even homes, and there are many homes that barely have a house to live in. So there's a difference between a house and a home.

Well, what is a home? Well, first of all, I have a few things here. First of all, home is the basic building block of society. In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve and when God brought Eve to Adam in marriage, God was not only instituting marriage God was also establishing there a home. The home is God's creation in paradise and the home is the most basic building block of all society, of all other relationships in society. Homes are what makes up communities. Homes are what makes up a church family. Homes are even what make a nation. And a home is where a person's morals and attitudes and behaviors are profoundly shaped so that a person is in large part who he is, he is who he is in large part because of the home that he came from.

I'm struck by that all the time. As important as Catechism teaching is, as powerful as the preaching is, a person's home life has such a powerful influence on the attitudes and behaviors and morals of a child. The home is the basic building block of society and that's why Satan's focus when he attacks God's people is not just on the church but it's on the home. He attacks families in a special way. He's got his eye on our homes. He encourages unbiblical views of marriage and divorce so that divorce is no problem. He encourages husbands and fathers to be tyrants in the home. He encourages wives and mothers to be feminists. He encourages spouses to be distant with each other. He encourages children to be rebellious. He encourages the state to usurp authority over our families. And with the TV and with Internet and with the cellphones and all kinds of busyness, Satan works to undermine the atmosphere of the home so that Christian parents have even less time now to instruct their children and give themselves as an example to their children, because the interaction they have with their children is so minimal. And perhaps that's especially true for teenagers. Distract the home with all these different things so that covenant parents can't even teach or give examples of what a holy life looks like to their children. Satan knows that the home is the basic building block of society, that's why he attacks it so vigorously, but God knows this too, of course, God designed it that way and that's why God also has a great care and gives much instruction concerning what happens in the home.

So, first, the home is the basic building block of society. Second, what is a home? A home is a place where fellowship takes place and that's what makes a home more than just a house. We can even say a home, what is a home? A home is the fellowship of the

people who live together as a family. A home is that fellowship. Now usually a home is made-up of a husband and a wife and their children. Sometimes God doesn't give children and then the home is the fellowship between husband and wife. That's what makes that a home, the fellowship there, and also, of course, the fellowship with family and friends that are welcomed into that home. Sometimes a home has only one parent. Well, then the home is the fellowship between that parent and the children. Or sometimes a person lives alone as a single person or as a widow, but still that's a home that that person has. It's a home because there's fellowship not just with the friends and the family who are welcomed into that home, who visit there, but it's a home because there's fellowship there with the Lord, our Father. Ultimately, God's people are never alone and where there is fellowship with the Lord, that's where you have a home, that's home life.

So what makes a home is the fellowship that the people who live together have with each other, and that's so true. I've been to weddings even recently that were so enjoyable. We're talking about a wedding now, not just a home but a wedding, and those weddings were spiritually edifying and pleasant, and after going to the wedding, I had to ask myself, why was that so pleasant? And the reason it was so pleasant and so wholesome and edifying was because there was a sense of fellowship, experiencing love and joy in the company of others. It felt like home for a brief time. It felt like I was in someone else's home at that wedding, family and friends gathered in Christ. And there was an atmosphere there that makes it a home. That's what a home is. In a home, family members know each other. They share themselves with each other. They can be themselves with each other. They share their lives with each other. That's a home. And as I said, a home is truly a home where there's not only fellowship with each other, but a home is truly a home where there is fellowship rooted in fellowship with the Lord.

So that can be the third thing we can say about a home. What is a home? A home is not only where there is fellowship with family members, but where there is that living relationship of friendship with each other in the Lord and with God himself. You know, God himself has his own home. God has his home in glory. God himself is a family God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And when God comes down and he establishes his covenant of grace with us, he establishes a relationship of friendship with us, what he does is he extends, you might say, the boundaries of his home. He establishes his home with us and our homes, our homes where we are gathering as family and friends and we enjoy that bond of fellowship with God and with each other. I can put it this way: a home is a work of God's grace. In the beginning when God made Adam and Eve, God established the first home in paradise but that home, you see, the home itself was fundamentally destroyed by the fall into sin and sin is what makes it impossible to truly establish a home because all that we are by nature is those who are walking in darkness. You can't have fellowship and friendship walking in darkness in the kingdom of darkness, it's only when God takes families out of that darkness and he brings them into his own marvelous light that you can have true fellowship and friendship and you can have home life.

Our homes are truly works of God's grace and then what happens in our own homes but it's a reflection of God's own family life. Husbands and wives in their home reflecting Christ and his church. Parents and children in their homes reflecting the relationship

between God and his children, you and I. And brothers and sisters in the home reflecting the relationship between Jesus Christ, our elder brother, and his brothers and sisters who are all part of the household of faith. That's what our homes are, reflections of that. It reflects the covenant love between God and his people in Christ, So what is a home? Well, the word covenant really gets at the heart of what a home is and what does that word covenant refer to? It refers to that relationship of friendship. We've talked about that already in our time together this past year, a relationship of fellowship that God establishes with his people in Christ, and a true home shares in that friendship and reflects that fellowship that exists between God and his people. In fact, the Bible uses very striking language to reflect his relationship with his people. John 14, Jesus is about to leave his people, and he's giving them comforting words and he says in verses 2 and 3, he says, "In my Father's house are many mansions, in my Father's home there are many rooms, many spacious rooms, many living quarters, mansions, rooms for you to live in." He says, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He says, "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also." And that's what home life is. That's covenant life, Jesus wanting to fellowship with his people. And that's what will happen when we're taken to glory. That's what will happen when Christ comes when the Father's house of many mansions is completely finished. Then the husband, the elder brother, the Savior of his people will gather his people unto himself and bring them to his home, bring him to his table to have perfect fellowship with him in glory.

So my point is the word covenant really gets at the idea of what a home is. A home is where you have that relationship of friendship and fellowship with God and with God's people, God's people whom he has put in your homes and families. And one of the main purposes of this series that we are beginning is to see how God would have us live in that covenant relationship with each other as husbands and wives, as parents and children and brothers and sisters. So this is a home, a home shares in and it is a reflection of God's covenant with his people and now just to apply that briefly for a moment, we can ask the question: where does that true covenant fellowship come to expression? What does true covenant fellowship in the home look like and where do you see it especially? Well, I think you see it especially at the kitchen table. Even Psalm 128 mentions that, "children around thy table." I realize that there are other places in the home where this kind of covenant fellowship and friendship is enjoyed. You see this when the family is driving and they are fellowshiping in the van or in the car. You see this fellowship when the family is working together doing chores, maybe washing the dishes or doing other chores. You see it in the fellowship between a husband and a wife in the marriage bed, this fellowship and friendship. But look at the kitchen table. There perhaps especially is where you see that fellowship in the home and there you see especially fellowship with God's people with God himself. That's where we open the scriptures and we together fellowship with the Lord and fellowship with each other in the Lord.

Don't look at the earthly possessions. Don't look at the the big screen that's plastered on the wall, the TV screen. Look at the kitchen table and what do you see there for your own homes and families? Do you see everyone on their phones ignoring each other? Do you see bitterness and bickering and fighting? Or do you see fellowship, family members

sharing themselves with each other, spending time together with the Lord? That's a home. That's what a home is, the home that is to be built.

Now as we move on we look again back at the text and the text says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it," and what that's telling us is this: when it comes to this home that we've just talked, when it comes to the building of this home, we can't do it, we can't build a home. Fallen, sinful humans do not have the resources or the ability to build a home ourselves. God is the one who builds homes. And I think that's very important for us to appreciate right away. I think it's very striking that that's how this beautiful Psalm begins. It puts that in your mind right away. I think this is very important, especially for our young adults, our young married couples, indeed all of us to recognize, you are not the one who builds your home. God is the one who builds homes and there's things we have to say here, but the point I want to emphasize right now is this: we can't be self-reliant, we can't be self-dependent when it comes to the building of our homes. I think that's so fundamental to understand because I think the default is, the default inclination we all have is this: it's up to me. It's up to us. This is my home. This is my marriage. This is my wife. These are my children. This is my home and I'm going to build it the way I want to build it, and I'm going to get everything in order just the way that I want it, place these things here, place these things here. I'm the master of my own domain. I think that can easily be the approach of young married couples when it comes to the question of whether they're going to have children right away or not. You know, this is their home, this is their family, they're going to build this home the way they want it built. After all, this is my life, this is my marriage and I will do with it what I want.

Now I know when it comes to having children, there can be some real questions. There are many things to think about. God gives us sanctified wisdom, but what I am simply warning against here is the attitude that says, "This home is mine. This is mine and I will do with it what I want. I build it the way I will build it." And then at the end of the day what do you have but something that you can be proud of. Pat yourself on the back for it because, "Well, this is what I did. This is what we did." And I think the real warning of the text this morning is this: God will show us all as his people one way or another that we don't build our homes.

I think one of the experiences that elderly saints have when they look back on their life is exactly this point: they look back at whatever the Lord gave them, they look back at everything and this is their conclusion, the Lord builds the home. Whether my children are all in the church, what a great blessing that is, or whether my children are scattered here or there or whatever the case may be, the conclusion is impressed upon us very keenly, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." And the point is, if that posture of humility and dependence upon the Lord is not learned at a young age, and if young couples do not learn right away that it's your Lord who needs to build your home, well, then oftentimes that humbling lesson will be learned later in life, oftentimes with much sorrow and heartache. You see, this verse gives us the right posture right away when it comes to this whole series that we are about to take upon ourselves. You have the posture right away and the right attitude. This is the posture, one of

humility and dependence upon God. "Except you build the house, Lord, everything we do here is in vain."

And you can see that truth come to expression in very real ways. God is the one who builds the home. First of all, we understand God is the one who shapes and forms every member of the family and puts them in the family. Ultimately, and this is what I think young couples need to realize in a new way: you don't get to choose the members of your home that you live in. God does. Even with marriage, in a certain sense, we confess God brings to every man his wife. In the beginning God brought Eve to Adam and established a home. God says, "I will establish this home." God built that home. And when you get married, you cannot expect to shape or form your spouse into what you want him or her to be. God has prepared the spouse, and God brings that spouse to you, and God does that also with the children he gives you too. God determines the birth and the personality of each child that's brought into the home. There's no room for boasting, no room for pride when it comes to our families. God's the one who's done it.

So first of all, God is the one who shapes every member of the family and then puts them in the home. Second, God is also the one who builds the home in this sense: he determines which homes will be Christian homes and who in the family will be a child of God. Think of Isaac and Rebekah, Isaac, one through whom the church would come forth, and remember Isaac and Rebekah, they didn't even have children for 20 years. And then when the Lord gave them children, they had twins, one was Jacob, one was Esau, one was elect, the other was reprobate. God's the one who made that home. God's the one making the church. God's the one who builds homes by election and he brings salvation to our homes and to our children according to his own eternal purpose and all our work cannot change the purposes of God. And third of all, God is the one who builds the home by his work of regeneration and his work of sanctification. The fellowship we enjoy in our homes, the fellowship with God we enjoy together, that's the work of God in God's grace in the home.

A home is a place where there's covenant fellowship enjoyed, and that's the work of our covenant God. And so again, what all this means, right when we start out with this series, is this: we all need a posture of humility and dependence, a posture of prayer and obedience and trust, if we don't get it straight that it's the Lord who builds the home, well, then certainly our homes will be a wreck. Well, having said all of that, what we also need to say is this: all of what we've just said does not mean that we as God's people don't have anything to do in the building of our homes, as if there's no calling or responsibility or activity to carry out. The psalmist doesn't say because God only builds the house, you might as well do nothing. No, the text even says, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." They labor and they build it but it's the Lord building the house, and we understand God uses means. Just as God uses the work of a farmer in order to bring forth a harvest and yet the harvest is of the Lord, and just as God works salvation in the hearts of his people, but he uses the means of of the preaching and faithful churches to accomplish this, so God also uses the godly behavior of family members and especially the behavior of parents as instruments in his hands for the building of his home.

God is the architect. God gives the blueprints. God provides the building material. God provides the tools. God even provides the foundation on which the house is to be built. God also provides the strength, the will to do it and the act of doing also so that in the end God builds the home and yet we understand there is a calling for us. And what is our calling? The calling is simple: follow his blueprint. Follow his plan. Build on his foundation. Use his supplies and use the tools he gives. Depend on him for all things, and in a word, do it out of him. Live by faith as you go forth with the task that God has put before you.

So there's the blueprint. There's the foundation. There's the the tools. What's the blueprint for building a home? All the scriptures. That's why we're beginning here because that's going to be our blueprint for the rest of the sermons. The scriptures give you all the instruction you need as you seek to follow God's will for your calling. The scriptures clearly define the place and the role of each member in the family. What's the calling of the husband in this home? What's the calling of the wife in this home? What's the calling of the parents? What's the calling of the children? In future sermons we're going to look at all these things. We're going to start next time, Lord willing, with a sermon on marriage. What's God's blueprint for marriage? That's how a home can be built when you have God's blueprint for marriage.

Besides the blueprint, there's the foundation. What's the foundation for a covenant home? Well, it's the rock that you need to build your home on, and who is that rock but Jesus? And that means you build on Jesus and his finished labors on the cross. You trust in his work. You rely on his righteousness as you seek God's grace for help and for strength, and then also you look to Jesus for grace and strength for the calling. It means we live each day knowing our sins in our homes, and then we go back to the rock and we understand our sins are forgiven in Christ, we have a foundation of righteousness in Christ, we have hope, we have a full salvation and we go forward. What this also means is that we live this way with each other. This is part of the foundation of the home, not just Christ, but reflecting Christ towards each other. We confess our sins to each other. How foundational isn't that for your home life? We confess our sins to each other. We repent of our sins and then together we go to the cross for forgiveness. And we forgive one another.

Besides the blueprint and the foundation, there's also the tools for building the home. There are tools. What are those tools? Well, there's prayer. God gives us the tool of prayer. Since we are so unfit of ourselves to build our homes, we rely upon God. We ask for his blessing, his grace and his Spirit, and we rely upon God in daily prayer. That's how we build our homes.

There's also scripture. You build a home with scripture. You need to follow God's word for yourself and your children. That's not just the blueprint, but that's the tool. You use scripture so even when you discipline your children, you don't just rebuke them, but I think one thing that's so profitable is actually let's open the Bible together and maybe I, as a parent, need to know my Bible better, but let this be a way in which I grow in knowing

it better. I myself search the passage that I need to bring to my child right now and then we together go under the word, hear it and apply it and and go forward accordingly. It's not just my voice you need to hear, it's not just my yelling, my rebuking, it's the word of the Lord. That's what's going to build us up as families.

Another tool that God gives is the tool of deride and reproof, Christian discipline and correction. Another tool God gives is the church and our life in the church and the covenant community, sitting under the preaching, making use of the Catechism instruction and the opportunities given there to really have our children learn God's word through Catechism. And then there's the blessing of the covenant community working together, not just looking unto our own homes but looking unto the homes of one another to borrow the language from Philippians 2. Not just looking upon the things of myself, but the things of one another. Looking upon not just my own home but the homes of others. And I'm thinking here of the good Christian school, what a wonderful tool and a blessing the good Christian school is for the building of our homes. That's what it's there for, the building of our families. The school's not there so that we can give up a certain amount of responsibility, free ourselves from the calling God has given me. That's not the point. But the schools are there so that we help each other. We mutually pursue God's calling and his will for our homes and our families, that's a real tool of blessing.

There are the blueprints, there's the foundation, there's the tools. These are all the things necessary for building a Christian home, things that God has given us to use for the building of a home and the point is when we build our homes accordingly, when we use the blueprints, when we build on the foundation, when we use the tools that God supplies and in a word when we build our homes according to God's word, then it will become very clear that we're not the ones building the home. You see, that's the point of it, that when this home is being built, all these things are being done, it's not me that's doing it. It's the word that has the power. It's the prayers that are being answered. It's the means of grace that are being a blessing and we're dependent on the power of the word and the Spirit of God. That's the point of the psalmist, trust the Lord, look to the Lord for his blessing, seek his blessing in the way of laboring according to his word and labor day by day in the acute consciousness that if you don't have his blessing for today, all your labor is in vain. "Except you, Lord, build this house yet another day, there's no point in me doing anything."

I need the Lord's blessing. I need the Lord. So I submit to his word. I seek out his instructions. I obey him. I trust in him for the building of a Christian home. Do it. Do it as you continue to build the home God has called you to build. Not just your marriage now but also children, raising children. Do it according to God's blueprint more and more and enjoy the blessings. What are the blessings? Well, the blessing is, first of all, enjoying a home that's not built by man. I don't want a home built by man. The blessing is enjoying a home built by God. I have a home that's built on a solid rock and then too, when the winds and the waves beat against the shore and against the rock, this house isn't going to wash out, and when troubles and difficulties come in our homes and families, the house, the home still stands. There's peace in the home. There are happy marriages, there are

godly children that are a joy. There's fellowship, a blessing to my own soul when it's the Lord's building the home.

The blessing will also be sleep. There will be sleep. You won't be anxious because you're not depending on yourself, you're not relying upon your strength and your self-sufficiency. So he gives his beloved sleep. I think that's the meaning of the last part of verse 2. It's vain for you to rise up early, to go to bed late, to eat the bread of sorrows, be full of anxiety. You need to be in that frame of mind and you need to recognize that it depends on the Lord, and that's how the Lord gives us sleep. We can sleep. We don't need to be anxious because our trust has always been in the Lord.

And the blessing will be that the home is a place of refuge. It's a haven where you and your children and your friends and family can escape to when there are troubles in life. You come back home. That's a blessing. The blessing is that in that home you enjoy the riches of God's covenant, friendship and fellowship with God, true happiness. And the blessing will be that in that home you begin to see and have a foretaste of heaven itself because that's what heaven will be, it will be living at home with the Lord forever. And you enjoy the beginning of that in your own home as you spend time with the Lord in your home, fellowshiping with the Lord. That's what this is, this is my home, in a sense. When the people went on their pilgrim journey to Jerusalem, they were going to the house of the Lord. They were in a sense going home to be with the Lord in a special way.

Is that what my attitude is when it comes to the family and the home, that that's where I want to be? And that's a picture for me, that's a taste of glory. That's what I want it to be. That's a rich blessing indeed. It starts out with this, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." May that be etched into our minds. May it shape how we live in our homes and in our families. And as we go forward, may this be the posture and the disposition that we take, "Lord, you build this home. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for the homes that thou hast given us, and we pray protect those homes, fill those homes with cheer and with joy, and may they be a safe refuge and a comfort for us in the midst of the struggles and trials and storms of life. Etch thy word upon our hearts. Give us a holy jealousy for our homes. And we pray that Jesus Christ, thy Son, might dwell in them richly and here in the house of the Lord also. Bless this preaching to our hearts and shape our lives by it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.