

The Family is the Nursery of the Church
Conference Message
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The following message, "The Family Is the Nursery of the Church" was delivered by Scott Brown at the Regional Uniting Church and Family Conference in Anderson, Indiana in 2008.

Well, we can take a deep sigh of relief this morning in knowing that this is our Father's world and in His kindness, in His everlasting love, He has provided for mankind whom he has created. He has established a number of ways to care for, to nourish to govern, to comfort, to bless the people that He has placed on the earth. He has provided for them from the day of their birth until the time that he takes them home. Everything that happens in between happens under His great, sovereign care.

He has provided many things. He has sent the Holy Spirit. He has established the Church. He has established various governments to care for us in the different phases of our lives.

He established the home and its accompanying government under the father as the nursery of children.

He has established the Church and its government of elders and deacons who oversee that flock.

And then he has also given the civil government.

If an individual sins grievously and extreme measures are needed, then God has given the civil government the power to execute justice.

So God has established ways of caring for human beings. This morning I would like to speak about two of those areas, the dual jurisdictions of church and home. These dual jurisdictions operate in parallel. They have similar responsibilities, but they are different in some ways. While they are separate, they are also very complementary.

I want to demonstrate that there are at least fifteen ways that the family is the nursery for the Church. When we get to the fifteenth one, we will see a very extreme example of how important the home is to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would just like to make it clear that the home cannot be understood apart from the Church, for the home is a discipleship community and that discipleship community mirrors many functions of the Church. And, at the same time, the Church cannot be understood apart from the home, for the Church itself is a household.

When we look at the various functions of both home and church in the Scriptures, we find that the home is a type of the Church and in some ways the Church is a type of the home.

For example, the home is a type of the Church in that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church. In that way a husband plays a mirroring role. He mirrors the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Church.

Here is another example. Children in the home obey their parents in the Lord. In other words, not only are children obeying their fathers and mothers as individuals in the home. It is a mirror of their obedience to the Lord. You can't disconnect a child's obedience to father and mother from his obedience to God almighty. If he is disobedient to his parents, he is by fact of its own nature, disobeying God Almighty. So the Church and the home are integral in that way as well.

We also see this in the way that wives submit to their own husbands as to the Lord. So a wife that is submitting to her husband in the home, that at the very same time that submission is a mirror of her submission to God. Every time a wife submits to her husband she is declaring that there is a God in heaven who deserves submission and obedience. What a beautiful declaration that is when a woman can humble herself and proclaim to her children and to all of her neighbors and to her husband that God deserves to be obeyed.

And so the home is a type of the Church.

Let me say this, as well. The richness of home life enters into the Church. And, on the other hand, the deficiencies of home life, the unpaid bills of the home, they finally come due in the Church and they affect the Church dramatically decade after decade after decade. The deficiencies of home life will be found expressed in the members of the Church.

Many church problems really just go back to problems in the home. Some people are disobedient and angry. Some are strikers. Some have evil inclinations and lack submission, love, and kindness toward one another.

Have you ever seen one person in the Church treat another person badly? Well, guess what? It didn't begin there. It began when they were little children; when they did not learn to honor the authorities that were in their lives. They did not love one another from the heart. They were allowed to be phonies in the home. When they went into the Church, they carried on those same qualities.

And so the unpaid bills of the home finally come due in the Church.

I really appreciate what Samuel Philips has said. He said, “The Church gives to home a sacred, religious ministry, a spiritual calling, a divine mission.”

So if you want to build strong churches you have to build strong homes because they are so intimately interconnected. The Bible makes it clear that the home needs the church and the church needs the home.

In this session, I would like to speak about the fact that the home is the nursery for the church and both the home and church are nurseries for heaven. They play dual and parallel roles for very similar purposes.

Two facts of church and home life

I would like to give you two facts about home life. First, we abuse the family by disconnecting it from the church. In doing so, we strip the home of its purpose and its significance and we defeat its role to equip people for Church membership. There are many people today who become frustrated with the church and then disconnect their families from it. This is a sinful practice that should be constantly argued against. In all of our homes we are preparing children for church membership, to be members of the body of Christ, to be a bride.

Second, we abuse the church by disconnecting it from the family. In so doing, we strip the church of its role to equip the family members to play their roles in society and to prepare them for heaven.

It is a fact well established that many of the church’s members come from the households in her midst.

Ways the Family and the Church Are Connected

And so what I would like to do this morning is give you a number of ways that the church and the family are connected.

First of all, the home is the place where children first hear the gospel and become familiar with the Bible. This is the place where fathers open their mouths in a parable and utter dark sayings of old. They tell of the great wonders of God and how mighty He is so that their hearts would not fail in any evil day that they face and that their hearts would be fortified by the fact that God is almighty, that He is perfectly sovereign, that all the hairs of their head are numbered, that He knows all the steps of their feet before they take them, that He has taken all of their tears and put them in a bottle, and that He will accomplish all that He has promised for them.

Second, it is the place where wives are washed with the water of the Word of God. Here a wife is nourished and cherished in such a way that she becomes a blessing and a resource to the other wives and the young ladies in the church. When a wife is washed in the water of the Word there is a veil of contentment, harmony, peace, and holy submission that infuses her soul. The peace of God which passes understanding is emitted from her as she becomes a resource to every fearful, harried woman in the Church. Thus, it is critical that a home is a place where wives are washed by the water of the Word.

Think of the release of wives like this into the church week after week on the telephone, in the personal conversation and in the relationships between the older women and younger women.

Third, it is the place where children are disciplined in the training and the admonition of the Lord. God has made it so that children would be taught primarily in their homes. The children are not to be outsourced for their primary training and discipleship. God has given the primary responsibility of disciplining children to parents. While there definitely are instances where it is proper for children to be taught and disciple by others, the overwhelming dynamic period of the training of children is to happen in the home where they are to be brought up in the training and the admonition of the Lord.

On the one hand they honor their fathers and their mothers. On the other hand their fathers and mothers are challenged in a dramatic way not to exasperate their children. And so the sins of fathers and mothers are brought to the surface in this process of raising them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord. The sins of parents are brought to the surface as they are tempted to exasperate their children. The sins of the children are brought to the surface as they are tempted to dishonor their fathers and mothers. And in this way the family is sanctified, again, providing more good, good fruit for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, fourth, it is the place of child evangelism where children thrill at the news of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see an example of this in Timothy who was converted through the teaching of the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother.

Fifth, it is the place where kings are trained. Proverbs 31 is a great illustration of this. Proverbs 31 is the words of a mother to her son, king Lemuel, teaching him how to be a king. She provides helpful insight, such as “Kings do not drink wine.” One thing he must do as a king is to identify a good woman, and his mother gives him the attributes for which to look. So the home is where kings are formed and raised up.

Sixth, it is the place where godly seed is planted and grown. In Malachi 4, we learn the purpose of marriage. What is the purpose of marriage? Godly seed. God says, “I desire godly seed.” And so He has put upon the shoulders of parents to give Him what He wants. God wants something from you in your home. He wants godly seed. Would you give it to him?

Would you create an environment, would you establish a schedule? Would you institute a culture that would bring about this godly seed and make this seed bear much fruit? We all know that it makes a difference how you treat seed. Some farmers treat seed poorly and their crops show it. Some farmers treat seed as it was meant to be treated and there are bumper crops, but it takes tremendous care and labor. It takes hours. It takes instruction so that one would be knowledgeable enough to raise good seed. It is in the home where godly seed is planted and grown.

Seventh, it is the place where the curse of God is held off. In Malachi chapter 4 we learn that if the hearts of the fathers do not turn toward the children God will smite the earth with a curse. Thus the home is the place where the curse is held back so that God would not come in judgment as he did with Sodom and Gomorrah. It is in the microcosm of the home that God looks to in deciding whether or not to send His curse upon the earth, and it may be that He withholds it at times when it would be so deserved because the homes are right.

And, eighth, it is the place where husband and wife stand together as heirs of the grace of life. It is the place of the demonstration of the love of God and the experiential understanding of grace as a husband and a wife turn toward one another and they deliver as a gift the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ all life long. For it is in marriage where God calls two people together to make a covenant that they would always be a source of grace toward one another.

And so God, in caring for his people in such a kind way, would insure that there would at least be one place in this world where grace and loving kindness could be extended through all of life and that is in a marriage. In this way, a child can see how the grace of God is communicated in this world.

And, ninth, it is a place where iniquity is held back for generations. In Exodus 20 we read where the Lord God says, "For I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children of the third and the fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

So not only is it a place where iniquity is held back for generations, but it is also the place where blessing is thrown off for generations as well.

Tenth, it is the place of marital unity where children learn of the nature of God and that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

One of the great doctrines that seems to have been lost in the Church today is the doctrine of the trinity. If one doesn't understand the doctrine of the trinity, one cannot understand love. If one does not understand the doctrine of the trinity then one cannot understand marriage. You can't understand the authority and the submission, the love, the honor that exists in marriage unless you understand the doctrine of God.

One of the tragedies of the modern church's refusal to teach the great doctrines of the faith, particularly the doctrine of God, is that you end up with a people that don't understand love. And so it is in the household that children can learn the doctrine of the trinity by observing the marriage relationship which mirrors it.

Eleventh, it is the place of marital love that is an earthly explanation of the love of Christ for the Church. The apostle says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself up for her that he might present her to himself a glorious Church."

Now, that means that the husband's love for the wife is a mirror of Christ's love for the Church.

How does the world know that God loves a sinner? He gives a sinful wife a husband who loves her. Nobody ever gets to marry a perfect wife. We only get to marry sinners. And what will we do with those sinners? The same thing that Christ has done for us who are sinners. He covers over our sins. He justifies us by faith and in an oblique, but similar way a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the Church. He extends the same kind of love that Christ has extended to him as a sinner. And this becomes an explanation of the love of God through Jesus Christ who shed his blood for all sinners.

It is quite possible that there are some of you here this morning who have never repented of your sins, you have never experienced the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ says to all sinners, "Come. Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." And this is the same kind of love that a husband should give to his wife. If you have not repented of your sins and embraced the gospel why don't you do it now? Why would anyone want to wait for the great blessings of the kingdom of heaven?

Well, God has given the family to be a place of marital love. That is an earthly explanation of the love of Christ.

Twelfth, it is the place of personal growth. In Luke 2:41-42 we read, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men." These things were happening in the context of his home. He was a son of a father and mother. He had brothers and sisters. And, yes, he, too, is an example of personal growth.

I don't know how to explain how Jesus Christ grew. Maybe some of you do. This is a very difficult explanation, but we know that it is true, that there is a way that even the Lord Jesus Christ somehow grew in stature in his household with his earthly parents.

Thirteenth, it gives the Church households of rare and beautiful treasures. Proverbs 24 says, "By wisdom a house is built. By understanding it is established. By knowledge its rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches."

And so the home provides the Church a household, a place of refuge, a place of hospitality, this outpost of riches. Think of the riches of the Church of the Lord Jesus

Christ. The Church has riches in her households as travelers are cared for there, as children are raised there, as the people in the community come there. They come into a place of riches. And it is a resource of the Church because households are formed by the members of the Church.

And then, fourteenth, it is the place where sound doctrine is established. In Deuteronomy six, in Psalm 78, in Ephesians 6:1-4 we learn that the home is a place where sound doctrine is taught.

It would behoove the family to deliver doctrinally sound children into the Church. It is a blessing to children's minds to hear the Word day after day so that they might know how to conduct themselves in the household of God, so that they would know and hold fast to the pattern of sound words that had been delivered to them.

These fourteen ways that the home is a nursery for the Church leads us to this fifteenth one which is of enormous importance. The fifteenth way is that the home is the place where elders are qualified. Not only does the home give the Church her members, the home also gives the Church her elders. And that makes the home a place of tremendous significance for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can see, then how wicked it is to separate the church from the family and to separate the family from the church. Yes, they are separate jurisdictions, but they have enormous impact on one another.

Twice Paul says that an elder must be qualified, first in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and then in Titus 1:5-9. More is written about the qualifications for elders than any other aspect of eldership. One of the most critical qualifications for an elder is the quality of his leadership in his family. This is of particular importance because his abilities in his family prove his fitness for ministry in the Church making a direct connection between the family and church leadership.

So in these two texts of Scripture which give qualifications for elders, the Church and the home are united.

There are people who have concerns about saying that the church and the home are united. Well, if you have any concerns about that, please understand that the home and the church are united at least in these fifteen ways that we have just spoken of.

So we can say quite rightly that the home is the nursery of the church. We could say that it is a factory of church leaders. It is the place of basic training. It is a cradle. It is a hot house. It is the boot camp, it is the basic training location for the elders of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 is very clear on the answers to three critical questions: One, who is qualified to lead the Church? Those who manage their households well. Two, how do you prepare yourself to lead the Church? By managing your household well. And, three,

why is there such a dearth of leaders in the Church today? I would say it is because the families are in collapse. The doctrine of the family has been lost.

How important is it that the biblical doctrine of the family has been lost? It is enormously important because it is in the home where Church leaders are built and verified.

In today's church, pastors don't have much sensitivity to the things necessary for the making for strong homes. I think most pastors really do dearly desire that their homes are strong. I am confident of that. But pastors in real life, though, don't focus that much energy on training family shepherds because they are so busy hiring other people to do their jobs for them and running a program and cranking the gears of machinery that eclipse this function. And I wish I had understood this as a young pastor.

I always wish that there were better, stronger, and more leaders in the Church. And how do you get that? You get it by developing strong homes where fathers lead their household well.

The great problem that plagues all the denominations and all the local churches that I have ever known of is the lack of leadership. That is a crying problem all across our nation including in family integrated churches. It is the greatest need of these churches and it always will be.

But how do you fix it? Well, you don't fix it over night. You fix it decade after decade in your home. You fix it with a one-year-old. You fix it with a two-year-old as you are singing the great songs of the faith and a three-year-old, teaching him the words of doctrine and four and five and six and the accumulation of knowledge happens. You don't fix this problem over night. It takes a couple of generations. Oh, brothers and sisters deal with this issue in your homes. Be a blessing to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ after you are dead when your children are there in the church preaching and counseling and helping and being servants of this great and mighty bride of Jesus Christ.

It is a good investment. The church will never go away. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. When you make an investment in the Church you are making this eternal investment. How many of us are making investments in things that will pass away? Well, the Church won't. God will not allow the Church to falter and fail. Of course, this bride can be scarred and marred, but God will see to it that he will bring her home.

So our investments are worthy investments in the homes for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Three Observations

Let me make some observations about the qualification of a well managed home for elders. First, this qualification is different most of the other qualifications in that it requires a skill. Most of the other qualifications are all about a man's heart and character.

An elder doesn't need to be skilful in business. He doesn't need to be skilful in a lot of areas, but he does need to be skilled in shepherding his little flock in his home. He has an ability to create a certain kind of tangible home life.

By wisdom a house is built. How does it happen? A man grows in wisdom as he studies the Word and then he applies its truth in the day to day operations of his household. In doing so, he fills his house with all precious and pleasant riches. Thus a man must be skilled in the managing of his home.

Second, it is a startling qualification in view of our culture, particularly in view of the breakdown of the family. All over the world divorce rates are soaring, children are being pushed aside into day care centers. In an environment where dysfunctional and broken homes are the norm, this is truly a startling requirement. What will happen to the church when the family breaks down as it is today? If the family fails where will qualified spiritual leaders come from?

And so how do we deal with this environment? Well, God has given us all authority to build homes for the glory of God. You can do it. You have complete authority to do it. And all you have to do is take the reigns and chart the course and break away from this wicked and perverse generation and the way that she is dealing with her families.

At the same time, this is a scary qualification, because the world is full of church people who were not trained right in their homes. Of course, God has so much grace toward His church that He can raise up from the dust, from those who have had terrible family lives growing up, qualified leaders. We know that God's grace is greater than this problem and that He will raise up those whom He would.

It is an unusual practice for the church in our day to choose men with this qualification in mind. It is so unusual that it is startling. How many leaders do you know in the church who were chosen because they fulfilled this family criteria as well as the other criteria?

Of course, one could, perhaps, manage his household well and fail in some of the other qualifications. But how many pastors inspect this area when they are bringing on another staff member? How many focus on it strategically and work it into the program of the church to train family shepherds? How many pastors do you know who put high expectations on the functioning of an elder's family?

In the modern church, pastors exert lots of energy, even wearing themselves out, to build small group leaders, to build youth leaders, to build board members, to build Bible study leaders. But very, very few focus very much energy on equipping family shepherds.

Thus, the tool of the family shepherd has been neglected in the church to our detriment.

If shepherds don't have their own home in order before God, can they in good faith tell the men in their church to manage their households well, lest they be disqualified? Thus

they ignore this qualification because sitting in the front row are his wife and children who are off out of control, being driven and governed by youth culture and not the culture of the kingdom of heaven. How can such a man instruct the church to follow this qualification?

Why Is It So Important That Elders Manage Their Households Well?

Why is it so important that elders manage their households well? Why is it even in the list of qualifications? What does a family have to do with the Church or, as we say in our modern political discussions, “What does character have to do with an office? What does a man’s marriage have to do with the office of the president?”

The Bible says a lot about this subject. I will just give you a number of reasons I believe are important. First of all, the church is like a household. The home is a household where male headship is in operation. The church is also a household in which the male headship is in operation.

D. James Kennedy said, “The scriptural mandate remains unequivocal. It calls unmistakably for the headship of the male in the family and in the Church, thus, setting up a structural connection between the two.”

And so the Church and the family are governed in the same way. It is important that a church leader know how to govern and be the head of his family because he will find that same kind of relationship in the Church. The Church is a family. The words “brother” and “sister” appear around 250 times in the New Testament. Paul gives Timothy instructions for how brothers and sisters should treat one another, the older woman treating the younger women, the older men the younger men. How do the younger boys treat the younger girls? They treat them as sisters.

The church is a family. It is a family of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and grandmothers and grandfathers spiritually. What a wonderful thing it is that God added this to us. He didn’t just give us our biological fathers, He went far beyond it and added many, many more so that there would be a greater depth and breadth and richness and sweetness of His ministry toward us.

Instruction on the family is found throughout the New Testament and it gives us insight into how we ought to conduct ourselves in the church because the church is also a household.

The Lord has used many graphic illustrations to explain what this household is all about. He, for example, speaks of the Church as His body. Christ regards the Church to be a very, very personal matter, to such an extent that He regards the Church as His own body. When He is speaking to Saul on the Damascus Road, Saul is persecuting the Church of Jesus Christ. And what does Christ say to him? “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He identifies Himself with his Church. “If you persecute the Church you are persecuting Jesus.” That is the idea, because the Church is his body. Anyone who despises the body of the Church despises the body of Christ.

There are many people who want to dissociate themselves with the Church. This is a very unChristlike thing. Christ continues to identify himself with his Church and we should, too.

You need to understand how serious it is when someone would cast wicked accusations against the Church and to treat her poorly. This person is mistreating the body of Christ himself.

Christ not only calls the Church His body, but also His bride. After all the years of marrings and failures of the church, when Christ returns, Christ will still relate to His Church as a bride. Think of the failures in Church history. Jesus still, in the midst of all of our failures sees us as his bride.

Do you think after 2000 years, you know, he would be thinking about the old lady or something? No. Absolutely not. The Church is not the old lady. The Church is the bride of Christ.

The Church is also a building, a building of living stones fitted together and built on the foundation of the apostles. It is a royal priesthood. The Church is a holy nation. The Church is the pillar and support of the truth. The Church is all these things.

What kind of leader would be necessary to lead a Church like this? The character of the relationships in the Church requires an unusual leader and it is in the home that that kind of leader is built. If a man can lead his home, he can lead this other amazing institution that is called a bride, a body, a building, a household, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Well, there is another way to look at this as well. Home life equips a man to lead the church in a relational way so that love would be the key in the church. For example, the one another's commanded in the Bible. Church leaders are required to help church members fulfill the more than fifty one another's of the Church.

What kind of quality would need to be in a leader to help his people experience the one another's of the Church? How about this one? Love one another. What kind of leader does it take to help a body of people love one another?

Well, that kind of leader is formed up in the home. If he can help his little flock at home to love one another and to not pick at one another and whine and complain and belittle one another, then he can help the Church to love one another.

David says, "You slander your mother's son and you think I don't hear that?" That is family gossip. A church leader needs to be one who can control gossip in his household, who refuses it himself and who helps his wife to not gossip about other family members.

How would a man learn how to cultivate love in the Church? He does it by learning how to cultivate it in his family. If you want to be an elder and your children treat one another

poorly, you need to understand it is your responsibility to help them love one another and to stop whining and complaining. Every time a child whines and complains at a sibling he is destroying love. It is a father's responsibility to declare war against it so that he can make the church, if he becomes an elder, a place of love. If he can't teach his children to love one another, how can he help the Church and the children of God love one another?

How about this one another? Be of the same mind toward one another? What is that all about? It is not about having the same opinion about everything; rather, it is about treating one another in the same way that Christ has treated you. What kind of leader would it take to help people of diverse views and understandings of doctrine to still love one another as Christ loved them? Where would you build a leader like that? You build him at home because in a home you have all different ages together and they often have differing opinions.

Have you ever had a teenager in your home who has interesting opinions that are actually contrary to wisdom? How do you help the members of the family love one another when there might be mismatches of belief in a certain area at that given time in their growing maturity?

Or pursue the things which make up for the building up of one another. Where does a man learn to do this that he might instruct others to do the same? Well, this leader is built in a home.

Or admonishing one another. Where does a man learn to properly admonish one another? He must learn how to do it in his home.

Have the same care for one another. Serve one another. Do not challenge one another. Do not envy one another. Show forbearance for one another. Regard one another as more important than yourself.

Well, church leaders are required to nourish all of these one another's in the church. Where will they learn how to do it? They will learn how to do it by doing it in their homes first. If they can't do it in their home, they aren't going to do it in the Church. That is the idea.

So why is it so important that elders manage their households well? Well, that is one reason: to make the Church a place of love as Christ intended it to be.

It is also important because the family is important. It is a critical aspect of God's work throughout history. There is a trans-generational element in the spreading of the gospel. There is the father and son delivery pattern of truth, both in the Old and New Testaments.

One thing we know is that when God wants to bless the world, He often uses a family. What does He do? He sends Abraham and his family so that His family would be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

And then He sends the Church, the household of God into the world to be His eternal family, to bring the gospel to the world.

Three Areas of Qualification for Elders

Well, the New Testament teaching on elders covers three major areas of family life. First, his marriage. He is the husband of one wife. He is demonstrating the love of God that is in the Trinity. He is one with his wife. He is a faithful husband and he does not have a wandering eye.

Next, it is his leadership in the home. He rules his household well as we learned from this text of Scripture.

He has his children in submission with all reverence. They are not accused of dissipation or insubordination, so it says in Titus 1:6.

He rules his household well. What does that mean? He rules. The term that the apostle uses here is the term *proisthmi* (pro-is'-tay-mee). And it means to rule, to preside over, to govern, to lead on, to go before, to chart the course. It means that a man has vision which he is implementing. He is doing something about them every day. God has given the government of a household to a father so that he would take it somewhere. That is what it means to manage a household.

If your family is going nowhere, where will you look? Look to yourself, brother, because you are given the responsibility to take your house somewhere.

The evidence of ruling your household well is that he has his children in submission with all reverence. These children have characteristics. They are faithful children. This means that they are not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

There are two kinds of children out there. There are faithful children and there are insubordinate children. Those are the two kids. Which kind do you have? If you have insubordinate children then you cannot be qualified to lead the Church of God.

This doesn't mean that all children have to be believers. This is my understanding of the text. A father cannot engineer the salvation of his children. Only God can do that. But there is a difference between children who are subordinate and insubordinate. That is the issue. They are faithful, *pistov* (pis-tos'). They are faithful children.

And then they are orderly children. They are not accused of dissipation. They are not in extreme rebellion. This doesn't mean that your children are perfectly obedient every 100% of the time. That is not reality. That is not what God is talking about. The reason God puts children in homes is so that they would continuously grow in their obedience. And so when your 16 year old dishonors it is not the end of the world, but he must return to honor and obedience.

There are two critical conclusions that come from this regarding child raising. First of all your children are the visible evidence of your qualification to lead. Second, fathers are responsible for the behavior of their children, for he must manage his household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way.

We have many extreme and terrifying examples in Scripture for the breakdown of a father's rulership of his home. Think of the terrible judgments against Eli and his heritage after him because he did not control his sons. Think of the warning in 1 Samuel 2:29. There are many warnings concerning this. It is extremely critical that fathers rule their homes well.

Next, he is qualified by his hospitality. Caring for a local Church is more like managing a family than managing a corporation and therefore hospitality is critical. It is the relational, rather than the structural or governmental aspect that is being spoken of here. An elder's home needs to have an atmosphere of hospitality. It needs to be welcoming and caring for people who enter into the home.

The home is meant to be a center of evangelism, a place of prayer. It is meant to be a place of refuge. Therefore an elder's household must be a house of hospitality as well.

Five Principles for Church Leadership

Ok. Let's go back through some principles for Church leadership. I would like to click through a number of principles that come from this text.

First, God intends his Church to be like a family.

Second, those who lead the Church must first be tested in their families.

Third, if a man can lead his family, he is able to lead the Church of God, if, of course, he is qualified in the other character qualities.

Fourth, if you want to build elders and deacons, then focus on training of family shepherds. Pastors, elders, should be exercising great energy to build family shepherds.

And, fifth, one of the reasons that we have dysfunctional churches is that we have so many dysfunctional families.

Benefits to an Elder Investing Time in Raising Family Shepherds

Let me give you some benefits of an elder investing time in raising up an army of family shepherds. Here are some. It will reduce the counseling load because the head of the household will be counseling his family as well as brothers and sisters in the church family as he is in their households.

Second, it will increase the evangelistic impact of his ministry, giving exponential results

across the generations. In leading one father to Christ, he will perhaps lead thousands to Christ across the generations. He won't see the fruit of his labor, but God sees it all, and someday it will come in. He may not see the bumper crop that is there in motion, but on that great day God will show it to us.

Number three, it will multiply his teaching output. Instead of teaching one day a week or two days a week, it will be every day of the week. People come to us and they say, "So, you have eliminated your Sunday school, have you?" We say, "Well, it is not so much that we have eliminated Sunday school, but we have established Monday school, Tuesday school, Wednesday school, Thursday school, Friday school, Saturday school and Sunday school as well."

And it will multiply a man's teaching output day by day. It will cause more people to be comforted and encouraged.

And then, fourth, there will be a sustainable, biblical leadership as the elders train up their replacements.

If the church ever wishes to have sustainable, biblical leadership then the church needs to get real about the home and take great pains to train men how to manage their households well.

Conclusion

And so along with the apostle Paul we would say, "Hold fast to the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me in faith and love which are in Jesus Christ."

I trust that we have seen this morning how much the home needs the Church and how much the Church needs the home and that the home is a nursery for the Church, giving her both disciples and leaders.

Would you pray with me?

Oh Lord God almighty, thank you for your great loving kindness in providing for your people, your creatures cast on this earth with fatherly affection, giving us households, giving us churches, giving us governments in which we would be cared for all our days. Oh Lord, I pray that you would give us mighty households. I pray that all across this land you would raise up an army of family shepherds who would shepherd their little flocks in the training and the admonition of the Lord and that they would know that you are so good. Amen.