

## The Christian Home (1): Its Importance

The importance of the family is seen in three things: its origin, its purposes, and its opposition. This means, the church is important because God ordained it for holy purposes, and protects it from its enemies.

### I. The Importance of the Christian Home

1. *Its origin.* The family was created by God. "The history of man began with a marriage" (Pollard).<sup>1</sup> "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen.2:18). It then continued with children, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen.1:28). The family is God's idea and is a reflection of His love and wisdom. "God sets the solitary in families" (Ps.68:6). "The family is a holy institution ordained and established by the sovereign Triune God who created the heavens and the earth" (Pollard).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the original family was established by God and consisted of a man, woman, and children. The family is of divine origin. Furthermore, the formation of a family necessitates marriage and childbearing. Because of the fall, some families have one parent and other families have no children, but ordinarily, a home is comprised of a man, woman, and children.

Webster's Dictionary defines a family as, "The collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or manager; a household, including parents, children and servants, and as the case may be, lodgers or boarders."<sup>3</sup> This can be illustrated from Proverbs 31, where the "household" of the "virtuous wife" consisted of "her servants" (v15) and "her husband and children" (vv27-28). In 1674 Richard Baxter published *A Christian Directory*, which consists of nearly a thousand pages of practical instruction on Christian Ethics (private duties), Christian Economics (family duties), Christian Ecclesiastics (church duties), and Christian Politics (societal duties). His section on Economics contains 150 pages of (double-column and small print) instruction. Concerning a family, he said, "a complete family must have four integral parts, a father, mother, son, and servant." He then clarified, "But to the essence of a family it sufficeth if there be but the one head or governor, and one or more governed under this head."<sup>4</sup> In 1609, William Perkins published a treatise on *Christian Oeconomie*, wherein he defined a family as, "a natural and simple society of certain persons, having mutual relation to one another under the private government of one."<sup>5</sup>

The family is a man and a woman in lifelong, covenantal companionship serving God by taking dominion over creation. Under His guidance and in fellowship with Him, they seek to be fruitful, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule over it to God's glory.<sup>6</sup>

2. *Its purposes.* There are three basic purposes of the family that underscore its vital importance. (1) It serves as a foundation for society. "God created the family to give structure and order to the human beings that He made in His image" (Brown).<sup>7</sup> "Well-governed families tend to make a happy state and commonwealth; a good education is the first and greatest work to make good magistrates and good subjects, because it tends to make good men" (Baxter).<sup>8</sup> It's in the home where basic principles of discipline, respect, kindness, and hard work are to be learned. "The puritans believed that the family was the foundational unit of a godly society. 'Such as families are,' wrote James Fitch, 'such at

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Pollard, *The Christian Family*, Sermon 1 of 17

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Pollard, *The Christian Family*, Sermon 1 of 17

<sup>3</sup> American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 Edition

<sup>4</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 410

<sup>5</sup> William Perkins, *Works*, 10:119

<sup>6</sup> George Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 5-6

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Pollard and Scott Brown, *A Theology of the Family*, 34

<sup>8</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 426

last the church and the commonwealth must be.' William Gouge characterized the family as 'a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned'" (Ryken).<sup>9</sup> Chaotic and undisciplined homes produce chaotic and undisciplined societies. As the family goes necessarily goes the church and the nation. "When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies, being ill-disciplined as a result, will feel that error" (Mather).<sup>10</sup> "The corruption of this first government (family) must of necessity give way to the ruination of the rest. For an error in the foundation puts the body and parts of the whole building in apparent hazard" (Perkins).<sup>11</sup>

If there be any truth in the figure, by which a nation is compared to a pillar, we should recollect, that while individuals are the materials of which it is formed, it is the good condition of families that constitutes the cement which holds it together, and gives to it its fine form, firmness and durability.<sup>12</sup>

The family being the seminary of all other societies, it follows that the holy and righteous government thereof is a direct means for the good ordering both of church and commonwealth; yea, that the laws thereof, being rightly informed and religiously observed, are available to prepare and dispose men to the keeping of order in other governments. For this first society is (as it were) the school wherein the principles of authority and subjection are taught and learned.<sup>13</sup>

Benjamin M. Palmer (1818-1902), in his book, *The Family in its Civil and Churchly Aspects*, describes how the family is essential to both the state and church. "The family is the original society from which the State and the Church emerges, and every other association known amongst men" (Palmer).<sup>14</sup> With respect to *The Family in its Civil Aspects*, he suggests "the family is the normal school in which subjection to law is first taught." He goes on to say that in short, it's in the home where our wills are forced to comply with a higher authority as well as a mass of competing voices. First, it's in the family that subjection to a higher authority is taught. "It's in the family where the will is made obedient to law. In this little empire the parent is supreme, and no appeal can lie to a higher tribunal, except the Divine. The power to enforce is as complete as the authority is absolute" (Palmer).<sup>15</sup> This prepares the child to subject itself to civil law. Disobedient children make for disobedient citizens. Second, it's in the family that preference to the good of others is taught. Without this, society would be filled with self-seeking citizens. "It is perfectly clear that no government could be framed strong enough to subdue and control a thousand imperious (arrogant) wills" (Palmer).<sup>16</sup> Thus, God first puts us in families to teach selfless humility before entering a larger society. "God's plan is wise. He breaks the race up into these compact domestic empires (families), and fits it there for the larger organizations which shall in due time be formed" (Palmer).<sup>17</sup>

It is under the wise instruction, and the impartial scepter of a father, and within the little family circle, that the son becomes a good citizen; it is by the fire side and upon the family hearth, that loyalty, and patriotism, and every public virtue grows; and it is in

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<sup>9</sup> Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*, 74

<sup>10</sup> Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 1

<sup>11</sup> William Perkins, *Works*, 10:112

<sup>12</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 3

<sup>13</sup> William Perkins, *Works*, 10:112

<sup>14</sup> B.M. Palmer, *The Family*, 9

<sup>15</sup> B.M. Palmer, *The Family*, 13-14

<sup>16</sup> B.M. Palmer, *The Family*, 11

<sup>17</sup> B.M. Palmer, *The Family*, 12

disordered families, that factious demagogues, and turbulent rebels, and tyrannical oppressors, are trained up to be their neighbor's torment, or their country's scourge.<sup>18</sup>

(2) It serves as a nursery for the church. The relation of the family to the church has become a debated topic. Which receives the priority: the family or the church? Some have focused on the family at the expense of the church, whereas others have focused on the church at the expense of the family. It's best to allow each one to play its God-given part. "We need to get the family to do its job, the church to do her job, and the state to do its job" (Brown).<sup>19</sup> "The family, church, and state have their own spheres of authority. Biblically, they are to be independent and not infringe or impinge on the others. Instead, they should support the others so each can do its job effectively and efficiently" (Scipione).<sup>20</sup> Strong families make strong churches, and strong churches make strong families.

(a) Strong families make strong churches. "The family contains the church in embryo. Godly families produce stable, growing churches; unstable families produce ungodly churches that often split" (Scipione).<sup>21</sup> "A holy, well-governed family is the preparative to a holy and well-governed church" (Baxter).<sup>22</sup> Most Reformed Christians describe the family as a little church. The family is to be a place of religious worship and instruction. "There are three things necessary to the well-being of a church. Those are doctrine, worship, and discipline; and something answerable hereunto there must be in our families, to denominate them *little churches*" (Henry).<sup>23</sup> "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Deut.6:6-7). "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph.6:4). "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2Tim.1:5). "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation" (2Tim.3:15).

(b) Strong churches make strong families. Churches are to instruct families in the truths of Scripture. This includes specific instruction to each family member. Wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves, masters, singles, older and younger men, and older and younger women. Thus, parents must first subject themselves to the elders of the church, as an example to their children. A discontent and disobedient church member, can hardly expect content and obedient children. Churches are to worship as families. Paul gave specific instruction to every age group with the understanding they would all be present together in the meeting. There was no "senior's church" or "children's church." Jew and Gentile, old and young, married and single, rich and poor, all were to worship together as one family.

(3) It serves as an illustration of the gospel. "God designed the family to be a living demonstration of various aspects of the glory of the gospel and the embodiment of biblical truth" (Brown).<sup>24</sup> This means, that every relationship within the family points to the gospel. Fathers point to the Fatherhood of God, children to the brotherhood, wives to the church, and husbands to Christ. Thus, gospel terms such as new birth, adoption, discipline, household, bridegroom, bride, wedding feast, and inheritance are all taken from the family. The family is a picture of the gospel. "The entire Bible is couched in family terminology" (Brown).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 4

<sup>19</sup> Scott Brown, *A Weed in the Church*, 89

<sup>20</sup> George Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 211

<sup>21</sup> George Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 22

<sup>22</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 425

<sup>23</sup> Mathew Henry, *The Complete Works*, 1:251

<sup>24</sup> Jeff Pollard and Scott Brown, *A Theology of the Family*, 34

<sup>25</sup> Jeff Pollard and Scott Brown, *A Theology of the Family*, 34

(a) The church is the family of God. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph.3:14-15). Jesus said His brother, sister, and mother are those who do the will of God (Mk.3:31-35), and those who leave father and mother for His sake, shall receive "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children" (Mk.10:29-30). Paul told Timothy to exhort an older man as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters (1Tim.5:1-2). "The church is not only *like* a family, it *is* the family of God. God causes dead men to be born from above by the Holy Spirit's power (Jn.3:3-8); they are given the right to become sons of God (Jn.1:12-13). The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption, seals men into God's family and helps them cry out, 'Abba, Father' (Rom.8:12-17)" (Scipione).<sup>26</sup>

(b) The church is the bride of Christ. The relationship between a husband and wife illustrates the relationship between Christ and His church. "The husband-wife relationship is a covenantal union that reflects the covenantal union between God and His people" (Scipione).<sup>27</sup> First, just as the woman was made from and for the man, so the church lives from and for Christ; second, just as the man and woman become one flesh, so the church and Christ are one; third, as a man and woman are to be fruitful and multiply, so the church is "the mother of us all" (Gal.4:26); fourth, just as the wife is to submit to her own husband, so the church is subject to Christ in all things; fifth, just as husbands are to love their wives, so Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.

3. *Its opposition.* The importance of the family is seen in its opposition and endurance. Satan and wicked men hate the family. And yet, as with the church, the family will continue until the end of this age. "It may live and flourish in all its tender charities, and all its sweet felicities, and all its moral power, in the cottage as well as in the mansion; under the shadow of liberty, and even under the scorching heat of tyranny" (James).

The devil hates the family because he hates the gospel of Jesus Christ. A mangled marriage communicates a mangled gospel; an unloving, selfish husband declares a loveless faith and lies about Christ's love for the church; an un-submissive wife represents the falsehood of an antinomian church; an un-submissive child images a disobedient individual child of God. The devil is on a mission, hell-bent to destroy the glory of God and His everlasting kingdom wherever it exists, so he aims at the most important target; the gospel. The gospel is the devil's bulls-eye because it reveals the Seed of the woman, who crushed the serpent's head at Calvary.<sup>28</sup>

Tyrants that crush the liberties of a state, cannot destroy the constitution of the family: and even persecutors that silence the preacher, and scatter the congregation, cannot hush the voice of parental instruction, or extinguish parental influence. Religion, hunted and driven by human power from the place of public concourse, would still find a retreat, as it often has done under such circumstances, in the household of faith; and *there* would keep alive, upon the family altar, that holy fire. Neither families, nor the church of the redeemed, shall ever be entirely lost, whatever changes the world may yet have to pass through.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> George Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 30

<sup>27</sup> George Scipione, *The Battle for the Biblical Family*, 30

<sup>28</sup> Jeff Pollard and Scott Brown, *A Theology of the Family*, 38

<sup>29</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 9-10