

5-9-2010, Festival of the Christian Home
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

The Christian Home
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This is Mother's Day, and we do want to express our great love and appreciation for the women who have been so self-sacrificial in caring for us. We could all tell stories of the second, third and fourth mile they have gone for us. And most of us simply took them for granted until we became adults ourselves and realized they didn't have to do what they did for us. They could just as easily have said, "I will give you a reasonable amount of care and attention. The law requires that. Beyond that, you're on your own." But they didn't stop at what was reasonable. They went on to do things that were completely unreasonable, because of their great love for us.

So, ladies, thank you for loving us beyond all reason.

The church has transformed Mother's Day into the Festival of the Christian Home. And that is where I really want to focus our attention this morning. I want us to consider how important it is that we are intentional in making our homes Christian homes.

When we're talking about our homes, we are talking about everyone's home, whether you are single, a married couple, or parents with children still living at home. We all need to be striving to have Christian homes.

Why? Because Christ leads us in the way of eternal life. He shows us the way to be more fully and completely alive. We will have better, happier homes if we make Christ the center of our home life.

I know the reason we resist being intentionally Christian in our homes. Many of us have seen so called Christian homes that were really only Christian in name and not in spirit. So many "Christian" homes are filled with legalism and judgmentalism and authoritarianism, with someone trying to force everyone else to conform to their understanding of the rules of Christian living. The result is a smug self-righteousness and intolerance for some; guilt and shame for others. No one wants to have a "Christian" home if that's what we mean. And for many that's what they think a Christian home would be.

But that's not Christianity. That's the way of the Pharisees. That's the very form of religion that Jesus tried to free people from. The truly Christian home will be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, not anger and condemnation, or impatience and constant criticism.

So, how do we make a Christian home?

Well, in Christian homes we do participate in the means of grace, such as prayer. Christian homes ought to be filled with prayer. We should pray together at meal times. We should have a family prayer time. I think we should turn off the television, and everyone come together to share joys and concerns from the day and for the coming day, read a short passage from the Bible and pray together. It doesn't have to be long. But it should be a way of saying, "Okay, God has brought us through this day. It's time to start getting ready for bed, so that we will be rested to do the work Christ gives us to do tomorrow."

Becky and I have raised our family. I've had a chance to look back and evaluate what we did right and what we did wrong. That is something we didn't do right. Neither of us came from homes that had family devotional times on a regular basis. We never established them in our home. I very much regret that. I think all of us could have gained strength and a sense of order

in our lives from a regular devotional time. I think our children would have developed a closer relationship with Christ by helping them develop their prayer lives.

Of course, it goes without saying that the members of a Christian home attend church together on Sunday morning. There will always be children who don't want to go to church. I've heard parents say that they don't want to force their children to go to church, because it will sour them on church. That makes about as much sense as saying, "I don't want to force my children to go to school, because I don't want to sour them on the value of an education." My experience is that children who are raised in the church are much more likely to be faithful to the church as adults than those who attend church sporadically as children. For most people, spirituality is an acquired taste. Those who are exposed to Christ regularly are much more likely to come to love Christ and give their lives to him. So, parents, take your children to church Sunday by Sunday as long as they remain in your home.

And when your children leave home, continue to go to church. So many parents drop out of church when their nest becomes empty. The message to your children is pretty clear: "We just went to church because you children needed it. But now that you are gone, we adults don't need the church." Guess what. Now that your children are adults, they will come to the conclusion that they don't need the church either. Sunday School and church are not just for children. If you want your adult children to be active in church, continue to set a good example for them.

So, Christian homes pray together, read the Bible together and attend church together.

They also join together in mission work. That's as important a means of grace as praying, reading the Bible and going to church. Members of a Christian home are involved in ministries of care and compassion for their neighbors, those in the community and those around the world. Our goal as followers of Christ is to help the people of the world live in peace and in harmony with one another, with God and with creation. The members of a Christian home find ways of working together to make that dream a reality.

In a Christian home, we teach one another to love all our neighbors. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus talked about a man who was from a different religion and a different race who provided extravagant care for a stranger who had been robbed and beaten, just as if he were a well-known and loved neighbor. Jesus tells us to be neighbors to everyone. Christian homes teach one another to be good neighbors to all God's children.

In a Christian home, people are Christ to one another.

There's a trick to being Christ to people, Christ wanted everyone to be their best selves. But the means to helping people be their best selves was different. So, Jesus treated people very differently in different situations. The best way I can put it is that Christ lifted up those who were down and yanked up those who were lowering themselves.

Christ was gracious, forgiving, and accepting of those who needed grace, forgiveness and acceptance.

At the same time, when Jesus saw someone giving in to his lower self, fear, greed, false-pride, laziness, and so on, Jesus called their hand on it. He did not hesitate to rebuke them.

We have to do the same thing for one another. In a Christian home, we want one another to be their best self. The way to do that is to tell one another what we see the others' strengths to be. We need to brag on one another. There should never be any question that every member of the home is respected and appreciated.

But in a Christian home we also ought to make it clear that we expect every member to be the best person they can be and to do the best they can do. We have too much respect for one another to let anyone settle for being less than they should be.

That means being willing to call each other's hand when we see someone lowering themselves. Whenever possible this should be done gently. If that doesn't work, you may have to be more blunt. Read the gospels and see how often Jesus rebuked people, including his disciples. He had too much love and respect for them to be quiet when they gave in to their lower selves.

But those who know they are loved, appreciated and respected can handle the occasional words of reproof. Just be very certain they know of your appreciation and respect for them before you reprove them. For every word of reproof there ought to be ten words of appreciation.

If we do that, then our homes will be joyful places. And that, after all should be the hallmark of a Christian home. A Christian home should be filled with joy. After all, the Resurrected Christ dwells there, and he brings eternal life to us.

So, ask God to help you make your home into a Christian home so that your home will be filled with joy.

Dr. Wesley Welborn
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