

THE HOME OF A CHRISTIAN

Exodus 20:1-12; Ephesians 5:21-6:9

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When our children were toddlers, I benefited from a personal translator. One person was especially adept at translating the grunts, screams, cries and syllabic vocalizations of little ones into a commonly understood language. Often, I would stare blankly at our children and ask their mother, "What do they want?" Frequently, Diane recognized my blank look and would translate without prompting.

In most families, mothers do that. They serve as the translator, the primary care-giver, the manager and the mediator; they most often take charge of feeding, clothing, dressing, and supervising children. They manage the schedules and mediate the disputes.

Even though fathers are sometimes pressed into this role, our track record of keeping appointments and administering justice is often less than exemplary. Most men lack one essential ingredient. We lack the ability to hear **what's not being said**. I know we men are often accused of not hearing **what is being said**, and maybe with some justification; but women have this knack of hearing what's not being said. They pick up on non-verbal behavior and actually hear silence. If their children are too silent (and believe me, I don't have a clue what "too silent" means), they immediately suspect mischief and often catch the kids red-handed. How did they know to look? Intuition. They have what experts label *global consciousness* or *awareness*.

My family still chuckles over the time I held 2-year-old Debbie in my arms and started to talk with some parishioners outside a busy grocery store. Momentarily, I lost sight of my toddler and went into a panic. I had visions of picking her limp body off the parking lot, so I spun around calling her name and craning my neck to see her. Can you imagine what those parishioners thought as they watched me call to my daughter and turn around and around with her still in my arms? How mothers are able to look after more than one kid, how they are able carry on a conversation and still watch a child, how they are able to pick up the house while supervising a toddler, how they are able to settle disputes among siblings and still make supper, it's beyond me; but it has something to do with this global consciousness.

Family counselor Gary Smalley lists many differences between men and women. As I became aware of them, I realized that God had a purpose in bringing two very different kinds of creatures together to make a family. **Studies show that when we men and**

women are together with all our differences investing in children, we do a pretty good job.

Increasingly, however, the job isn't getting done. Do you remember when two teenagers from Littleton, Colorado, Eric Harris and Devin Kleibold, had their pictures on the cover of *Time Magazine* with the words stamped beneath, "*The Monsters Next Door*"? The magazine not only recounted their villainy at Columbine when 14 students and one teacher died, but asked the question, "What's happening in our nation that is creating this gruesome and unprecedented violence on school grounds?" In the four years before Columbine, January of 1995 through December of 1998, how many people do you think met violent ends at U.S. schools? 173. What percentage of kids ages 9 through 17 worry about dying young? Fifty percent. Do you know what percentage of children between ages 12 and 17 know someone their age who is carrying a gun? Thirty-one percent. It seems that we're slipping into a terrible abyss. What can we do?

It is significant that the first institution God made is the family. "*From the beginning God made them male and female,*" Jesus said; and together the husband and wife became one flesh, a family unit. **The first human community was a home. Our greatest gifts come from the home, and so do our most difficult problems.**

In the Ten Commandments, there is one commandment that carries a promise. There is no other promise written on those tablets of stone. God links long life and prosperity with an honoring relationship between a child and his or her parents. There is something powerful and productive about honor in the home. When honor flourishes among parents and children, homes and nations prosper. Conversely, we suffer as a nation when we suffer in the home. As critical as it is for individuals to be redeemed by Jesus Christ, homes need Christ's redeeming work as well. I lift up to you today not simply motherhood, but the incredible need, the amazing gift and the demanding call of a Christian home.

What makes a home Christian? Does the fact that you go to church make your home Christian? Does the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your savior make your home Christian? Does decorating a house with Christian sayings, religious nicknacks and pictures make a home Christian? What on our part produces a home where Christ's redeeming work is present?

Key to individual redemption is repentance and faith. Believers taste the love of God when they see the damage of their actions, turn to Christ for forgiveness and seek God's power for change. In the same way, a home that is authentically Christian is a place where honesty and honor exist. Parents exhibit an honesty where they admit their sin, seek forgiveness and pursue God's power to change.

When children see their parents recognizing and turning from their sins, they witness God's redemptive work. They learn about honesty and confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. The truth is that *we teach what we know, but we reproduce what we are.* Therefore, it is critical that we become open to correction if we want our children open to

it. It's imperative that we seek forgiveness if we want our children to seek forgiveness. It's crucial that they observe reconciliation and growth in us if they are to embrace it. It is essential that they see in us a humility before God and a passion for Christ.

Secondly, when we ignore someone's words, we disrespect them. Regardless, of what we confess with our lips and believe in our hearts, we cannot value someone and quickly dismiss what they say. Jesus told his followers that if they love him they will obey his commands. If they honor him, they won't treat his word with contempt. A Christian home is not merely a place where Christ is acknowledged. It is a place where Christ rules because His word becomes the dominant guide for daily living.

I have found great gold, tremendous value, in one of the most neglect passages of the New Testament. Many ignore Ephesians 5 although it carries divine wisdom for a Christian home. Some skip over this writing because they think Paul's dumping on women. However, Paul spends three verses exhorting women and eight verses exhorting men, so who is he really dumping on? Moreover, the nasty word "submission" is not mindless obedience. Submission is an act of honor. Submission recognizes the divine hand in our relationships. We are to submit to one another out of honor for Christ. We are to recognize that Christ is visiting us in our brothers and sisters. Christ is visiting us in our spouses. How we treat them is how we treat Christ.

God wants us to know that our relationship as husband and wife makes an important difference in how we relate with God. If we mistreat our spouses, we dishonor and grieve God. If our spouses are miserable over our relationships with them, what makes us think that we are following God and forming a Christian home?

God first addresses our relationships in marriage and then focuses on our role as parents. That is the order that brings health. As we show honor in our marriages, we show honor in our children. We actually train our children in honor. Moreover, as we instruct, train and discipline in view of God's perspective, we encourage our children to honor and know Christ. Christ is the key. Christ is the bread. Are you producing an environment that helps your children listen and walk with Christ?

None of us would like to raise our children in a bar, but they experience that in a home video. We don't care to model sexual promiscuity, but we provide them with heroes and heroines who model it on our televisions. We condemn violence, but they are entertained by it hour after hour through movies, television and video games.

In the past 25 years studies have been done on communities where television has been introduced. In a Canadian community, inappropriate physical aggression increased in first and second graders by 160% after two years of television. Physical aggression increased with other children as well. After two decades of television in Canada, and the United States, the white homicide rate doubled. However, in South Africa, where television was unavailable, the white homicide rate dropped by 7 percent. We need to carefully question whether the television is helping or hurting us? Are we careless with it in our home? Do we really want violence, promiscuity and vulgar language in our homes?

The home of a Christian may be very different from a Christian home. It all pivots on what role Christ plays in our home life. Children are not clones of their parents. They each are very unique. They respond differently. They can embarrass the socks off their parents. However, we parents can experience Christ's reign and rule in our homes. We can see great things. We are not helpless. However, we face formidable forces. We parents need help. We really shouldn't have to face our challenge alone.

We need singles pulling for married people? We need grandparents, uncles and aunts pulling for us parents. We don't need judgment or criticism; we need prayer and encouragement. *The home of a Christian whether formed by a single person, a single parent, or a large family can make a wonderful impact when Christ is followed.*