

Series: Five: Timeless Values for Today's Church

Title: Family Focus

Text: Psalm 127:3

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Patrick Henry was a famous lawyer, politician, and patriot who was influential and instrumental during the American colonies' bid for independence. He famously said, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Now regarded as one of the United States' founding fathers, he was present at the first Continental Congress. Though Henry was involved with important matters related to the destiny of nations, he had an ardent commitment to family. Before his death, he left a last will and testament for his children in which he said, "There is one more thing I wish I could leave you all – the salvation of Jesus Christ. With this, though you had nothing else, you could be happy. Without this, though you had all things, you could never be happy."¹

Like Henry, Tabernacle Baptist Church has a zeal for godly families. Our fourth core value is a "family focus" in church ministries. We state our value in this area by saying, "We desire to provide biblical ministries that support and empower families." Pivotal passages that undergird this passion include Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 127:3; Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 78:1-8; Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 11:18-21; and Joshua 24:15. Psalm 127:3 upholds the high value of families by saying, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: And the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3, KJV). In what follows, we will examine our commitment to the family by looking at five ideas from Scripture.

GOD AND FAMILY

The Bible upholds the importance of families in God's plan for human history. In His created order, the Lord has established three human institutions — the family, government, and the church. The Lord ordained marriage and family as a means of populating and subduing the earth. In Genesis 1:28, the Lord told the first man and woman: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."

In the Lord's divine design, the family is also a means of reflecting His image upon the Earth. Social harmony and good are established via families that operate according to His parameters and precepts. His attributes and glory are manifested through loving parents and obedient children (Ephesians 5:25-33). After the Lord commissioned Adam and Eve to take dominion over the Earth, the Bible said, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). The Lord's emphatic pronouncement — "very good indeed" — revealed the blessed and beneficial nature of the family unit.

J. Gresham Machen was a conservative theologian of the early Twentieth Century. He is best known for His landmark work "Christianity and Liberalism" and his founding of the Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA. Throughout his life, he held a high regard for the family, though he remained a bachelor until his

¹ Shared in Lancaster Baptist Church podcast by Pastor Paul Chappell, September 4, 2022, Episode: *The Assurance of Salvation, 1 John 5:10-13*.

premature death in 1937. His love for family was evidenced through his close relationship to his mother, to whom he dedicated his famous Greek grammar which is used in schools of theological education to this day!

Concerning the value of God's institution of the family, Machen once said:

The most important of such institutions, according to Christian teaching, is the family. And that institution is being pushed more and more into the background. It is being pushed into the background by undue encroachments of the community and of the state. Modern life is tending more and more toward the contraction of the sphere of parental control and parental influence. The choice of schools is being placed under the power of the state; the "community" is seizing hold of recreation and of social activities. It may be a question how far these community activities are responsible for the modern breakdown of the home; very possibly they are only trying to fill a void which even apart from them had already appeared. But the result at any rate is plain — the lives of children are no longer surrounded by the loving atmosphere of the Christian home, but by the utilitarianism of the state. A revival of the Christian religion would unquestionably bring a reversal of the process; the family, as over against all other social institutions, would come to its rights again.²

Written a hundred years ago, Machen's words could now be regarded as being nearly prophetic. Indeed, God's divine design has faced innumerable assaults by society. In an age in which many see the family as being nothing more than a social construct that is devoid of any divine meaning, God's people need to recapture a high view of the home!

JESUS AND FAMILY

Lest any Christian should doubt the prominence of the family in God's plan for humanity, it is worth considering the teaching of Jesus. In Mark 10:6-9, our Lord said, "But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:6-9). Notice from our Lord's words that He quoted Scripture when speaking of marriage. He regarded the Genesis narrative as being authoritative for beliefs and practices related to the family.

The word translated "joined" in Mark 10:9 is one that was used in first-century agrarian society to speak of two animals who were yoked together. As used by Jesus, the term depicted marriage as involving a permanent union.³ He meant to correct rabbinical schools of thought from his day that gave excuses for divorce in flippant

² Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity & Liberalism: New Edition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2009), 130-131.

³ Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 89.

situations. According to Jesus, His people should have a high regard for marriage and family.

SATAN AND FAMILY

Since the beginning of human history, Satan has had a fever-pitch hatred for the family. The reason for his rage is twofold. First, he desires to steal glory from the Lord (Isaiah 14:13-14). Since he knows the family is designed to reflect the Lord's image (Genesis 1:28-30), he tirelessly wars against the family unit. Second, Satan is well aware that procreation through the family is the means by which the Lord ordained to send the promised Redeemer — Jesus Christ. In Genesis 3:15, the Lord told Satan, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." Understanding that one would be born of woman who would destroy him, Satan immediately began to lash out against the first family. His assault was first seen through the way he undoubtedly instigated the conflict between Adam and Eve's offspring that would lead to the death of their son Able (Genesis 4:1-16).

When we turn to the New Testament, we find further evidence that there is a Satanic conspiracy against the home. It is not happenstance that Paul's great discourse on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-20 came immediately after his famous instruction on the Christian home in Ephesians 5:22-33. The Devil has always despised the family, and he will always work to destroy families. Concerning spiritual warfare, one has said, "If you are a Christian, you are a targeted man, a marked woman. The forces of evil have taken out a contract on you. Satan's out to get you. If he can't take you to hell, he'll do his best to make your life a hell on earth."⁴ Those words can be applied to moms and dads who seek to build godly homes. Satan hates the family! Spiritual vigilance is needed!

THE FAMILY AND FAMILY

A study of Scripture reveals that the Lord established the home as a place for training children in the ways of the Lord. In the Shema, the foremost passage of Scripture for Jews living under the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord told Israel:

Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

Faithful Jews quoted the above passage multiple times a day. The precedent for parental training of children, however, was not limited to Old Testament times.

The role of mom and dad in training kids continued into the New Testament church. Paul told believers at the first-century church of Ephesus, "Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"

⁴ Alcorn, Randy. The Purity Principle: God's Safeguards for Life's Dangerous Trails. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 12.

(Ephesians 6:4). It is because of these reasons that Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher of the First Great Awakening, once said, “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief of the means of grace.”⁵ God has ordained families to being training grounds for the souls of young children.

Modern believers need a commitment like Joshua who said, “But if it doesn’t please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). One modern Christian author has commented on these things:

The fathers of families have as truly the charge of the souls in those families, as pastors have of the churches. The family is the training ground for both Church and State, and if children are not well principled there, all will fail. The Devil has a great spite at Christ’s kingdom and he knows no better way to crush it than by the perversion of youth. He strikes at family duties with success because the practice is not so seriously regarded as it should be, and neglecting it is not liable to be noticed.⁶

THE CHURCH AND FAMILY

All that we have discussed above leads us to Tabernacle Baptist’s core value regarding families. What place does the church have in God’s plan for the Christian home? Considering the way both Paul and Peter’s used their letters to give instruction to parents within local churches (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-25; 1 Peter 3:1-7), it seems obvious that apostolic teaching through the church has a prominent place in the establishment of godly families. Churches should provide biblical preaching, teaching, and ministries that support families in their efforts to disciple their children.

One Christian author has commented on the way parents need holy assistance as they seek to raise children: “Christian parents need help in a variety of areas. In particular they need help with regard to family worship. Most Christian dads feel inadequate when it comes to teaching the Bible to their children.”⁷ Tabernacle desires to equip parents so that they might succeed in one of life’s greatest responsibilities. Through preaching, teaching, children ministries, and periodic discipleship training events, our church labors to provide Scriptural truth to strengthen families.

⁵ Murray, H. Iain. *Jonathan Edwards A New Biography*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 178.

⁶ Stephens, Don. Family Worship: A Neglected Privilege. *The Banner of Truth Magazine: Dec 2017*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 1.

⁷ Murray, David. Exploring the Bible Together: A 52-Week Family Worship Plan. *The Banner of Truth Magazine: Aug & Sept 2022*. (Edinburgh, U.K: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2022), 57.