

A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

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I Cor 13:13a

Someone has said:

“The trouble with most homes today is that there is too much month left after the money.”

Last Wednesday evening, at The Hour Of Power, I had another problem: too much talk left after the time! I was only able to give the first point of a three point sermon on the subject: A House Is Not A Home.

Because I feel the making of Christian homes is such an important matter and, because this is Mother's Day and the issue at stake is directly related to our mothers as well as our fathers, I announced then that I would bring the other two points of that message today.

For the benefit of those who could not be present Wednesday evening, let me review briefly some of the salient points of our discussion up to now.

A Model Home

We established there are three ingredients necessary for the building of a Christian home. Paul mentions these in the last verse of I Cor.13:13a,

“Now abideth faith, hope and love.”

Without these three ingredients, no home can even survive let alone be called Christian. With them, in their true Christian force, there is the splendid prospect of living in a place which can only be described as

“a little bit of heaven on earth

The first of these three important factors is

Faith.

I came across a survey recently in which American teenagers are rather blunt in their appraisals of their parents. Twenty-five percent of the boys and fourteen percent of the girls said their parents were too busy with secular and social activities, and did not give them enough time. I suppose we might have expected that criticism. But the real shocker to me is the fact that nearly 50% of the teenagers questioned, and notice their choice of words, accused their parents of failing to give them proper religious training.

They had nothing to say about lack of material things. Apparently it was not important enough to even mention. But the one thing they really wanted and needed—a deep and abiding personal faith—was denied them by the very people from whom it should have come: their parents. This damning indictment should give each of us who are parents cause to do some serious self-analysis.

Now of course, no one wants their children to be pagans. Most parents want them to be religious, up to a point! They would like the church to give them what faith they need, so long as the church doesn't get carried away with its job and turn them into fanatics.

This is the crux of our real problem. For this widely prevalent practice of delegating to other people the duty of training our children in the way they should go is one of the real dangers facing our nation. In all too many cases, the responsibility which belongs to the home has been given over to outsiders.

We ask the schools to teach our children how to think. We ask the scouts and the “Y” to teach our children how to live. We ask the church to teach our children how to pray. We even ask the entertainment world to teach our children how to play. In large part, we have become a nation of parasites asking others to do the job which is rightfully our own.

Now of course we need the schools. The scouts. The “Y.” The churches. We even need the

entertainers, whether they perform on a baseball field or ride hard in the saddle across our TV screen. Good clean fun and entertainment is a normal and healthy part of life. As Dr. Nels Ferre puts it:

“A person who is too busy to play is too busy to be married.”

But after all is said and done, it is the thinking, living, playing and praying which is taught at *home* which goes deepest and lasts longest. That’s why it is so terribly important to give our children a Christian faith while they are young. Psychologists tell us that a person learns more between the ages of one and five than at any other period in his or her lifetime. Those fertile, plastic years are spent at home. Graphic proof of the importance of Christian training in those early years of your youngster’s life.

In a very real sense, our whole life pattern as adults is directly related to our childhood training and experiences.

Let me show you what I mean. Maybe those of you who were here Wednesday evening will remember my reference to a baseball pitcher. Allow me to repeat it, for I think it illustrates quite effectively the truth I’m trying to get over.

When a pitcher completes his windup and is ready to deliver the ball, at the moment the ball leaves his hand he gives his wrist a twist. This causes the ball to spin as it approaches the plate so at the end of its trajectory it suddenly breaks or curves, making it harder for the batter to hit. By flicking his wrist in different ways, he can make the ball curve in, out, up or down. A good pitcher can even make it hop when it approaches the plate. The action of the ball through all of its journey is largely determined by the direction it is given at the very start when it leaves the pitcher’s hand.

I think the point is obvious. The direction a child’s faith takes is largely determined by the beginning it is given in the home. For that reason, what we do is much more important than what

we say.

It's here that what some call the "family alter" comes into our discussion. In using the term—family alter—I mean a period of anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes a day spent in family bible reading and prayer.

“The family that prays together, stays together.”

But what is more, this actual demonstration of Christian faith on the part of the parents is something the children can never forget. Some of the sweetest memories I have are of sitting with my Mom and Dad and sister around our kitchen table in family devotions.

Actions speak louder than words. We can never really convince our children we believe in Christ, if we never talk about Him or to Him in the home. We can never really convince our children we believe the bible is God's word if we never turn to it for guidance in our daily lives. We can never really convince our children we believe in prayer if we do everything else *but* pray when we face a problem or perplexity. And we can never really convince our children Jesus is Lord, if we shove Him off to the periphery of our family life.

How can you build a Christian home? How can you give your children what they really want and most urgently need? Well, it will help to remember that you cannot impart to others what you do not have yourself. So I would suggest you begin by making sure of your own faith. And then, continue on from there, by making Christ real in your home. Include Him in your conversations. Look to Him as a family for guidance in those very normal trials and tribulations through which every family goes. Trust Him to supply all of your needs according His promises.

This is ingredient Number One for the building of a Christian home: faith. Deep, abiding, personal faith that spreads from you as a parent to every member of your family. The second factor is

Hope.

By hope I mean something different than that which we normally mean when we use the word. In this case, I am thinking of hope meaning security. Does that seem far-fetched? Let's think about it for a moment.

There was a time when the world outside was reasonable stable and secure. There was a recognizable set of values and standards. An orderly and, on the whole, promising course ahead. There was little cause for apprehension. We lived in a neat little island surrounded by two great oceans. We were free from the fear of invasion from without. What troubles we did have to bear were of our own making. And the answers, though not always easy to find, were sure to be found just around the corner.

There is no need to dwell on the fact the all of this has changed. The world about us is insecure. How much more important, then, becomes a place which can afford some solid ground upon which to rest our tired bodies and troubled souls. And where else can we expect to find such a place than in our homes?

Here the confidence shaken outside can be restored. Here the failures or blunders can be shared and understood. Here the anxiety and tension can be relieved. Here the wounds of life can be healed. For here a husband or wife, a son or daughter, has a right to expect what he or she cannot find in any other place: the hope or security of love and understanding.

I think this was best illustrated for me in a recent article on the current television idol, Ed Sullivan. His daughter, who writes the article, tells how on the morning she had to face a difficult examination in school, she always found this little note pinned to her school books:

“Darling, give it your best. Then win, lose or draw,
we love you.”

Such understanding and security may seem axiomatic in relationship to the home. But believe it

or not, there are many children, and many husbands and wives, who never know what such love and understanding really is.

I was told just the other day of a mother who sent her children to the same university from which she graduated. The daughter had wanted to attend another school. But there was a particular sorority in that university to which the mother had belonged and she wanted her daughter to have the social acceptance she felt that particular sorority would give. When her daughter did not receive a bid to join, the mother was humiliated and actually rejected her child. The result, for the daughter, was a nervous breakdown.

That story may strike you as being an exception, but believe it or not, with slightly different details it is repeated almost every day. To those of you who are in earnest about this business of building a Christian home, may I say this: Whatever else your home may be in a material sense, make sure it is a place where each member of the family can have a sense of belonging, an assurance of understanding, and a knowledge that, while all else around her may be tottering and about to fall, here is a place of hope. A place where he can know that darkness is not eternal, and that after the night there will come the dawn. The final ingredient is that of

Love.

There are two facets of this third factor to which I would direct your attention.

The first is that of –

Discipline.

So many people seem to forget that

“Love is not all sugar and spice and all things nice.”

It is not cheap sentimentalism. In the Christian sense, perfect love is perfect justice. Look at the highest example of this: the God and Father of us all. Our Heavenly Father is both strict and loving. He is, at one and the same time, perfect holiness and perfect love. There is no sentimentalism in God. Next fall, I have a teaching scheduled on the subject: “The dark line on

God's face."

At that time, we'll have an opportunity to discuss this more fully. But for the moment, will you let it go with this? Because God loves us with a perfect love, He disciplines us with a perfect justice. As we read in scripture:

"Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth" (Heb.12:6).

It cannot be otherwise with us on the human level. If we do not love our children enough to discipline them, we do not love them enough. If we do not love them enough to teach them respect for the moral order, we do not love them enough. We leave them to drift without direction as a ship at sea without a rudder. As a matter of fact, child psychologist's tell us that children prefer loving strictness to willy-nilly sentimentalism. It gives them a sense of security. Security that is founded upon the feeling that life is built upon law and order.

I enjoy the story of the young mother who's youngster was raising havoc in the toy department of the local department store. He was jostling the other kids about and pushing them this way and that. All the while, his mother was saying, "Honey, please don't do this." "Honey, please don't do that."

When he got on a trike and began riding up and down the aisles, the manager of the toy department approached the mother and said, "It appears you're having some difficulty controlling your boy. We have a child psychologist here. Would you like me to call and ask for help?" In desperation, the young Mother said, "Please, do."

The psychologist arrived, inquired of the problem and the young mother said, "Oh my, there is nothing I can do to get my child to obey. If you have any suggestions, I'll be happy to take them." The psychologist said, "Wait here." He took the little boy aside, bent over and whispered something in his ear. The youngster looked up with a start, turned, went back to his mother and said, "C'mon, Mom, let's get outta here!"

Well, the change in behavior was so startling, the young mother said, “Son, wait here for a moment, I want to talk to that person.” She beckoned to the child psychologist and said, “Please, tell me, what on earth did you do? I’ve been trying to get my boy to obey me. He wouldn’t do it. You come over, say one simple sentence and he responded immediately. What on earth did you say to him?” The child psychologist said, “Why, ma’am, it’s very simple. I just leaned over and said, ‘Listen here, you little brat. If you don’t get out of here, I’m going to set your britches on fire!’”

Out in Idaho, I met a mother who had nine boys. She had nine boys. That’s right, nine boys! When I asked her how she did it, she answered: “We have two rules in our house. The Golden Rule and another one about so-o-o long.”

You folks have never met my father. Actually he’s rather short. When people see us together, they wonder how such a little man could produce such a tall son. Really, it’s quite simple. You see, when he was young he was a very good boy and his dad was always patting him on the head. With me, it was just the opposite! You talk about raising kids. My father raised me every hour on the hour some days, with a good swat on my swatting place! But when all the ballots are in, the vote will show that I love and respect him all the more because of it. Yes, the first quality of love is discipline.

The second is

Loyalty.

Of course, loyalty will be extra hard if it does not begin with genuine love. So many marriages are entered into on the basis of infatuation rather than love. I saw many illustrations of this when I was working in my father’s Christian Serviceman Center during the war. We had young ladies from various churches serving as hostesses. I saw it happen again and again. Some simple-souled sailor with long eye lashes and curly hair would walk in the door. One of those girls would let out a squeal and latch onto him with a modified half-nelson. Before he knew what had happened,

she's be mooning about the place in a dreamy-eyed fashion cooing: "I've got it! Vibrations! Palpitations! I'm in love!" What could the poor guy do? He had been taught to obey orders and so, down the aisle he went.

The tragedy, of course, is when the honeymoon was over and they got down to the hard work of making a marriage, they discovered to their chagrin that what they thought was love was mere infatuation. A lot of those marriages cracked up at that very moment.

Now, just in case there are those here this morning who have been married for a while, and now decide they do not love their partner, don't think I am sanctioning an easy divorce. We Baptists hate divorce just as much as anyone else.

You say you made a foolish marriage? Well, that's something for which you may or may not be to blame. Dr. William Lloyd Phelps of Yale University has said:

"The real test of character is not whether you made a foolish marriage. But after the foolish marriage has been made, to turn that failure into a success."

When you have entered into the marriage bond, you are duty bound to be loyal to the one with whom you are wed. You may have to begin with irritation and move toward toleration. From there, you may have to grow to respect and through respect, to love. But remember, love is something more than mere emotion. To be sure, it stirs the deepest feelings. But more than that, it is essentially selfless and self-giving. It is ready and eager to make adjustments. It does not argue little points of privilege or battle for its own way. For true love is loyalty and seeks only to express itself through affection, consideration and service.

Perhaps you are wondering why I have injected this idea of loyalty in marriage when, in a larger sense, this is a sermon on the responsibility of parents to their children. My reason is quite simple. The relationship between a husband and wife cannot be separated from their relationship of

parent to child. The two are intertwined. When they break faith in one area, they are breaking faith in the other.

Have you ever been out in the woods where loggers were felling trees? If so, you will recall that when a great tree is cut and begins to fall, it does not go down alone. Reaching out its long, leafy branches it carries along with it whole piles of tiny, tender, youthful trees. To me, this is the parable of the home. When you as a parent go down, you never go alone. You carry along with you those little ones who are gathered about you and who look to you for strength and guidance. Indeed, loyalty is critical in a Christian home, for “A home is like a bank. It goes broke if you take more out of it than you put in.”

Now abideth faith, hope and love. These three. With them you cannot fail to make a model home. Without them, it will not be a home at all. It will just be a house with people living in it.