

February 10, 1974
Deuteronomy 6:3-7 (NE)
Ephesians 6:1-4 (NE)
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CAN WE SAVE OUR HOMES?

There are very few persons who will disagree with the assertion that the most important influence in any person's life is the home out of which he came. If we think back over the important factors in the past which had the greatest impact on us, we may well think of an individual teacher or friend, or even an event, but taken all in all, nothing ever influences the great majority of us more deeply than the home which nourished our mind, our spirit and our body during the earliest and formative years. It is hard to overcome the influence of a bad home, and nothing promotes good character and high ideals more than does a good one.

Today home and family are having a rather bad time of it. The reasons are multiple. The home is no longer a sanctuary from the world. The world has invaded it with radio, television and a hundred and one competing interests, until today the home is often the place of last resort — the place we return to when there is nothing else to do and nowhere else to go. It may perhaps still be a haven from the cares and pressures of the world but one to which we resort less and less.

When I speak of the home I do not speak of the physical dwelling — the house. The home is a place where there is privacy, security and love. In this sense it is probably true that many persons today have no home to which they can retreat when the world becomes too much for them. Sometimes there is more discord and disharmony in the home than there is in the outer world. That is an unfortunate and tragic thing, for every person, young and old, needs to have a home which is "a haven of blessing and a place of peace", a place of love, understanding and appreciation, wherein he can regularly withdraw from the noxious poisons of the world and in an environment which is always supportive and forgiving, regird himself for future confrontations. Because it is the only place where this kind of an environment can be built, the home in which there are two loving parents is the most important institution in our society. But that institution is taking a terrific beat-ing these days. You know them as well as I so we need not go into detail concerning all the pressures that are being exerted against it. Rather let us talk briefly about what can be done to strengthen the home in order to make it the place it ought to be and the place that is so vitally important to us as individuals and as a society.

II

In spite of what I have just said I must begin on a somewhat negative note. It is a note I hesitate to sound at all, particularly at the beginning, for I may well lose part of my listening audience immediately. Please, therefore, try not to turn me off until you have heard me out.

I believe that the women's liberation movement has had an over-all negative effect on the American family. I am not condemning the movement in saying this but merely noting its consequences. More and more women are employed outside the home. Fewer and fewer women are satisfied to remain at home as wives and mothers. The net effect is that the home is becoming less and less a place of family security.

There are exceptions, of course, but in general one must say that it is important that every elementary schoolchild should at the end of the school day enter a home wherein there is someone present to welcome him with love and be ready to listen to him with patience and understanding.

It is extremely difficult for a mother to work for eight hours at an outside job and then give the child all of the time and concern the child needs and demands. Yet how extremely important that care and concern is during the early years. There is very little that can be substituted for it, certainly not a nicer

house and not more material benefits.

Perhaps the answer is that the father must spend more time at home and with the younger children. Certainly it is true that too many fathers spend far too little time with their children. It was Pearl Buck, I believe, who once pointed out that not only fathers, but mothers also, were spending so much time away from home trying to make a better life for their children and trying to save the world for their children, that those same children were going to hell. Loss of contact with the parents often leads to loss of respect. One is reminded of the German visitor to America who was asked by a housewife what he noticed first about Americans, and the man replied, "The remarkable way parents obey their children." It is a symptom of what has happened.

We need but look to the statistics to read the story. Most crimes committed in this country are committed by young people about the age of these boys who re-ceived their God and Country Awards this morning. Obviously something has gone wrong with these young people. And when something goes wrong with our children and youth the first place to look is in the home. And when something is wrong in the home the result is often usually a poor relationship between parent and child or the lack of any relationship at all.

III

So now let us look at the home, not with the idea of condemning, but with the hope of helping.

First let a word be said to the children and youth who may be listening this morning. The responsibility for creating a warm and supportive home does not rest exclusively upon the parents. The young also must make their contribution, especially as they become teenagers. Young people can weaken a home and sometimes even wreck it with their attitudes and actions. A good home demands cooperative endeavor on the part of all members, not just the father and mother. If you are a young person who thinks his or her home is not what it ought to be, look first at your own place in the family. What are you doing to help or to hinder?

Secondly, I like a suggestion made by a psychologist friend of mine. It is his idea that every family ought to have one thing which they do together and do well. It can be a sports activity; skiing, or golf, or tennis, or bicycling. Perhaps it will involve one of the arts, or reading, or a hobby held in common. Everything tends today to tear the family apart. It is often torn asunder by everyone wanting to go his own way. It needs something to bring it back together.

In this connection family traditions can have great meaning and be very helpful, and in years to come be a sense of great joy. After a Christmas sermon last December, a young bride sent me a note to tell me that she and her husband had decided on two traditions for their future family. One was to institute family prayers around the tree on Christmas morning, and the second to give each child just three gifts each Christmas in commemoration of the gifts given to Christ by the Wise Men. Adhered to through the years, those practices could become a rich and treasured memory, while at the same time unifying the family spirit.

IV

Every family should seek to build for itself a sense of unity and a loyalty toward one another. The family is the oldest unit of society, much older than the nation. God has put men in the midst of families for a reason. It is in that compact personal and intimate relationship that the young can grow and mature in such a way as to be best prepared for the world which they will one day have to face. Perhaps God is even using the family to prepare us for eternity. If you can't live happily in your own family, will you ever be able to live happily in the Kingdom of Heaven?

The family is the most important fellowship most of us will ever know. In no other place are we ever likely to be more welcome, more loved and accepted for what we are.

A sense of unity and loyalty depends however on enlightened love and wise discipline. The two are not contradictory; in fact one demands the other. Parents manifest their love when they are able to say and to mean something like this: "In this house we go to church on Sunday. In this house children don't smoke or drink. In this house parents will know where their children are at 11:00 o'clock at night. In this house we don't watch just any kind of television or movie fare. In this house we seek always that which is good, true and beautiful." I was raised in that kind of home, and rather than regret it, I continuously thank God for it.

V

It would be wonderful, wouldn't it, if we could write the script for our own family life the way they write it for the movie and television screens? On those lovely programs like "The Waltons", the dialogue is so perfect, everyone always says the right thing at the right time. But that is fiction and you and I have to deal with the real thing. Because we do, building a Christian home is not always easy. As someone once said, "It would be easy to be a Christian if one didn't have to be a Christian at home." That's where it really gets tough. But that's also where it counts the most.

Those men and women who years later look back on their childhood and their home with gratitude and thanksgiving know that their parents weren't perfect. But they can remember how hard their parents tried. It is the memory of that effort that makes their own lives more noble and honorable. Nowhere in this world or in this life can you and I do more to contribute to a finer and better world than in our own home, working with our own children. They are the marks our lives will leave on the future.