

Cultivating a Gospel Culture at Home

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January is family month at Bethel. Last week our message was, *When My Family isn't Perfect*. The first week was on a Christian marriage. The same biblical principles applied to both messages. We are all imperfect sinners. But God will redeem family relationships as we apply God's love to us toward them. We can practice stretchy love and humility that thinks honestly, *I'm the worst sinner in our family*. This minimizes the "he said, she said" and focuses us on our own failures and what needs to change in me.

Next weekend is about parenting. Parents need help! There are few greater points of struggle than parenting. The Bible has a lot to say about it and yet too many Christians wing it or listen to secular advice about how to do it. The stakes are incredibly high as what could a Christian parent want more than to do all they can to raise the child toward saving faith in Jesus? Please, please, please come.

For this week, we are talking about the culture of the home. It doesn't matter what your life category is. This could be married with no kids, married with kids, not married, married with adult children, widowed with grandchildren. There are lots of possibilities.

All homes have a culture. The culture of a home is the ethos of the home. It is the often-unwritten code and practices and patterns in the home and the way a family lives together and relates to each other. Every family has its own culture. That culture feels normal to you. When you marry, this can be a shock to the system. Jennifer and I are still discovering cultural differences in our family backgrounds. Here's the thing, whatever your culture is, it has become that over time through a series of choices. A choice of habit here. A choice of communication there. Over time, choices become norms and norms become culture. How might you describe the culture of your home?

There's nothing wrong with home culture itself. However, because of our fallen nature, our cultures are broken too. The godliest family in our church will still have practices that are counterproductive to the redeeming of your home for the glory of Jesus. There are some family cultures that make it very difficult for spiritual growth or Christian excellence. Culture eats up all our good intentions. No doubt in this message I am going to challenge at least a few cultural norms in your family. If you leave here determined to make changes, these will come only with long-term concerted effort because culture doesn't want to change.

But change they must. Just like the reformers used to say about the church, *reformed and ever reforming*. A Christian family is committed to a journey and that journey is toward increasing likeness to Jesus. How? Through cultivation. Cultivating is an agricultural term and a family is like a garden. Ignore a garden and it is quickly overrun with weeds. To have a healthy garden you must constantly be cultivating the flowers, fruits, and vegetables. You must also be on the lookout for the constantly creeping weeds that threaten your garden.

What Cultural Values Should be Cultivated in the Home?

The fear of God...the culture of a wise family

We begin here because if this isn't in place, the other values will never appear. It takes wisdom to want a gospel culture in your home in the first place.

*"Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars...
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."* (Proverbs 9:1, 10 ESV, emphasis added)

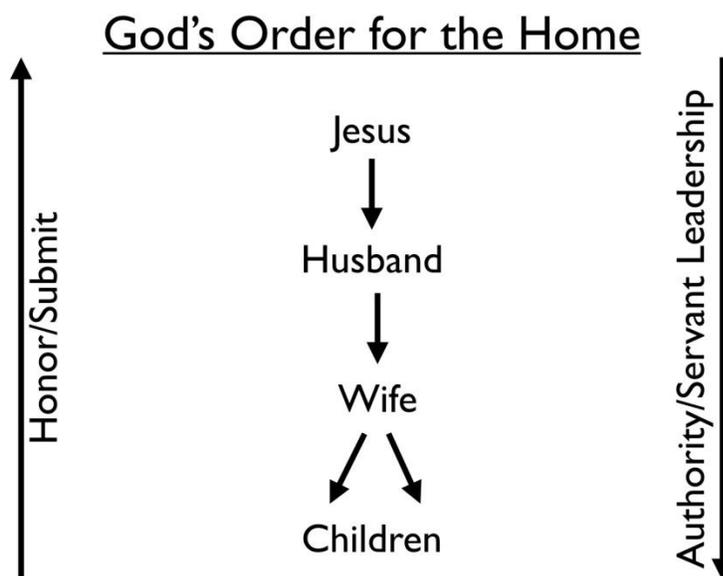
Wisdom's starting point is the holiness, glory, and majesty of God. Wisdom comes to me as I feel my responsibility to him for worship and obedience. I don't see myself as god of my family or my marriage or my children. My marriage and family are not primarily about my marriage and family or children. My home and marriage are about God. I think of Joshua who clearly understood this and famously said, *"Choose this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."* (Joshua 24:15)

The starting point for a godly culture in a home is having the right God reigning over it. So many other gods compete for power: personal comfort, materialism, raising children who vote right, etc. When these are the gods of the home, family relationships become transactional. I give you what you want so I get what I want. Proverbs reminds us that *"When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers."* (Proverbs 28:2 NIV) Homes can look like that. Little fiefdoms. Lots of rulers but no king. *"The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down."* (Proverbs 14:1 ESV)

I'm sure we can all think of examples of homes that have been torn apart by folly and sin. A husband or wife, mom or dad, undermines a gospel culture by making choices that tear the family apart. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."* (Proverbs 9:10) Who is the god of your home?

Honor and authority...the culture of an ordered family

God has a plan for the family. Did you know that? It's no surprise that God's plan brings order and clarity because he is a God of order. *"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."* (1 Corinthians 14:33 NIV) The God who brought order into the galactic/atomic order we see in the universe, wants each of our homes to be a place of functional order and peace.



Key verses

- *"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."* (1 Corinthians 11:3 ESV)
- *"For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior."* (Ephesians 5:23)
- *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise)."* (Ephesians 6:1-2)

Notice that it begins with Jesus as the head of the whole thing. Jesus delegates leadership responsibility/authority to the man in the marriage and the parents in the home. Children, is there any verse in the Bible that gives you authority? Keep looking. This is a functional authority. It is not an authority based on worth or value. Who can question the worth of a child? But the Trinity has functional authority. The galaxies have order. The atom has order. God brings order to the home.

The husband is called to lead and to love his wife. A wife is called to submit to the servant leadership of her husband. We covered these two weeks ago.

But notice that when a home has little additions, the little additions need to understand their role in the home. Kids, you have it easy. You have two things to do. There is an *attitude* to adopt – *"Honor your Father and Mother."* (Ephesians 6:2) This means to respect them; to hold them highly in terms of importance and value; treat them with utmost respect.

The *action* is obedience. Isn't that easy? All you have to do is honor and obey your parents. *But, but, but*, actually, "but" has something to do with it as when you don't, they are authorized to introduce your butt to the board of discipline. Or as my mentor used to say, "It's amazing that when you discipline children here (on their behind), God gives them wisdom here (in their head)."

Since honor is one of your responsibilities, your parents should discipline you not just for what you do, but the attitude in which you do it. If you are angry and defiant, even if you do what they say, they would be wise parents to discipline you for your attitude, wouldn't they?

God has a plan. Here it is: the Christian home reverences God and seeks to model their home according to his plan.

The grace of the gospel...the culture of a Christian family

Now we are on what makes a family distinctively Christian. It is not the orderliness of the home. Unbelievers can have great organization and love. What makes a home distinctively Christian is the culture of grace. **Grace is undeserved kindness and favor toward others.** It's not earned. It is freely given. Grace is the basis of our relationship with God and we should be glad it is. If God got transactional toward us, it would be over for us because he doesn't need anything from us.

Doesn't that describe the way many families operate? When I'm a mess, you withhold your love. When I disappoint, you may choose to love another. When I fail you, you refuse to forgive or you leverage it against me. Graceless families are like Alcatraz. All bars and cells. All life sentences without the possibility of parole. Once you are there, there's no getting out. Sound like any family relationship you are in?

What makes a Christian family so very special? Grace!

- *"Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."* (Ephesians 2:5)
- *"But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace."* (Romans 11:6)
- *"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."* (John 1:16)

The gospel is not that we deserve reprieve from God. It's not that we have to perform better to get a second chance. The gospel is that God grants us ongoing grace which allows us to constantly restart with God.

The Christian in the family will be easily identified as the one who understands God's grace to them. The reason this is key is that to be in a family with other sinners is to be regularly offended by them. Sometimes daily. Sometimes hourly. Sometimes every minute. To be a Christian requires you to freely receive God's grace, and to extend it to others in the same way. *"Freely you have received, freely give."* (Matthew 10:8 NIV)

About two weeks ago, I shared that Jennifer and I will get all wound around the axle on something. We get to a point where we realize that this argument is so tangled, there's no resolving it with everyone happy. Further, some attitudes have come out that are making us less likely to resolve this. So, one of us will say, can we hit the reset button here? By that we mean that the emotions of this disagreement are affecting our relationship. We are drifting away from grace toward one another and moving closer toward law. My law and you submitting to it.

A Christian understands that God is constantly in heaven toward me hitting the reset button going, *click, click, click*. So to "click" toward my spouse, brother, sister, mother-in-law, whoever, is not so hard because I hear the divine *click, click, click*.

Let's get something out of our minds here. A great Christian family is not a family where dad is Billy Graham, mom is Mary Magdalene, or the children are like Jesus—no crying they make. Get that out of your mind. A great Christian family is great at grace toward one another. We need that to be the goal of our marriage and our parenting and our home. Put that in stencil lettering in your home, *This house runs on grace*.

In my own childhood, one of the stand-out moments in my memory is when we were elementary age, my mom got all us kids together on the stairs. She confessed that her attitude the day before was not right. She asked us if we would forgive her. That's one of my sweetest memories.

No doubt we have marriages and families sitting next to each other here today. You came in here mad. There was no grace in the car on the way here. But we celebrate here the grace of God to us; massive, undeserved grace. God's grace has profound implications for this conflict you are having. I wonder if we have some families here who maybe need to do this signal to each other. *Click*.

Tips for a Gospel-Cultured Home

Regular family worship and prayer

There are few things as helpful as having a regular time of sitting together, reading age-appropriate biblical truth, and praying together. It sets a tone. It reminds everyone that the God of the Bible is the God of this home.

Prayer is powerful in this way. Do it more than just before the meal. Let your kids see you praying. I've shared before how powerful it was for me growing up to see my dad on his knees every night at his bed praying. Men, more than anyone, your example sets the temperature spiritually in the home. You are the thermostat. You have such power to influence your family by the things they see you care about, get excited about, and celebrate.

I would encourage you to develop a habit with this. Schedule it. For some families, morning is best. For others, it's maybe after the evening meal. Ask questions of the children. Get them curious. Read the Bible and pray together.

I would also add this: I think faithful participation in a local church is a spiritual anchor to a family. And when that becomes a maybe or hit or miss sort of thing, it communicates to the kids what is important and what is not.

Honor one another...with words, manners, and actions

Pastor Ray Ortlund Jr. was blessed with a godly father. He says his dad would often end the meal and say, "*Let's go around the table and affirm one another.*"¹ You might be thinking, my family would never do that! Mock each other? Yes. Complain about this or that? Yes. To go around and say what we appreciate about each other sounds crazy, but doesn't it sound just a bit wonderful?

A Christian home will have a tone of encouragement and words of affirmation. I'll add that common courtesies say a lot. What about the basics like *please* and *thank you*? Ladies, does chivalry feel honoring to you? How about sons holding the door for your mom and sisters? Set a general tone of honoring one another.

The gospel says that every person in our family is an object of God's love and every fellow Christian a person Jesus died for. That alone should produce a courtesy and respect that shapes how we speak to each other and speak about each other. That is true in the church family as well.

Today is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. It's right that we say that every life in the womb is precious; an image-bearer of God. Family is where we get to show that outside the womb in the way that we treat one another.

Celebrate what is good, true, and beautiful

You can know a lot about the culture of your home by what you talk about, laugh about, and worry about. Two lists are very helpful:

¹ Ray Ortlund, Jr., "Proverbs on Family Life." Ortlund.net. August 29, 2010.

Love	True
Joy	Honorable
Peace	Just
Patience	Pure
Kindness	Lovely
Goodness	Commendable
Faithfulness	Excellent
Gentleness	Worthy of praise
Self-Control	

When God gets control of a person, these fruits of the Spirit become evident. Similarly, Christians who delight in God will delight in and honor what God delights in and honors. Truth. Goodness. Beauty.

Try and celebrate these things and minimize their counterparts. What is the opposite of good? Evil. What is the opposite of lovely? Crude. Crass. Lewd. Locker room humor. What is the opposite of love? Hate and violence.

Fill your home with these things. Avoid being entertained by or laughing at their opposite. The TV and Internet in some families pump a constant stream of garbage into the home. Crude behavior and language. Then over the dinner table it's all about body functions and sophomoric humor. Is that good and beautiful?

I'll share a personal opinion, if we celebrate and are entertained by violent movies or men beating each other to a pulp or Simpsons-type humor, we are setting a cultural tone. Are they absolutely wrong and aren't you being legalistic in saying that? This is a message on grace not legalism. I think that's the wrong question. We have to ask these questions over things in our family culture, *Are they helpful? Do they move us as a family toward grace, truth, goodness, and love for one another?* "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.*" (1 Corinthians 6:12)

A godly family, a wise family, an ordered family, and a grace-filled family applies wisdom to their time, their conversation, their entertainments, their leisure, and their relationships all for the goal of honoring God in the home.

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