

An Old-Fashioned Home

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of home life and the need for Christian homes where Christ is honored, where God is loved, and where the Bible is studied.

Scripture: Genesis 18:19, Psalm 127:1, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:20

Topics: "Family Values", "Christian Home"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the importance of the home as the foundation of society, emphasizing the impact of what is seen and experienced within the household on shaping individuals for time and eternity. He shares stories of homes where God is honored, love is present, and the Bible is central, highlighting the role of parents, especially mothers, in influencing and guiding their children towards faith and righteousness. Chapman stresses the significance of family altars, prayer, Bible study, and setting a Christ-like example in the home, underscoring the need for homes where Christ is honored, God is loved, and the Bible is studied.

Transcript

TEXT: "What have they seen in thy house?"--2 Kings 20:15.

If you will tell me what is in your own house by your own choice I will tell you the story of your home life and will be able to inform you whether yours is a home in which there is harmony and peace or confusion and despair. Let me read the names of the guests in your guest book, allow me to study the titles of the books in your library in which you have special delight, permit me to scan your magazines which you particularly like, allow me to listen to your conversation when you do not know that you are being overheard, give me the privilege of talking but for a moment to your servants, and make it possible for me to visit with your friends in whom you have particular delight--and I will write a true story of what you have been, of what you are, and of what you will be but for the grace of God, even though I may not know you personally at all. In other words, whatever may be seen in your home determines what your home is.

I was a man grown before I visited Washington, the capital of the nation. I was the guest of a member of the President's Cabinet. Riding with him the first evening, when the moon was shining, we suddenly came upon the National Capitol, and I said to my host, "What in the world is that?" He said, with a smile, as if he pitied me, "That is the Capitol building, and that is the home of the nation." I am sure he was right in a sense, because the building is magnificent, and is in every way the worthy home of such a nation as ours; but I think I take issue with him, after careful thought, in his statement that the Capitol building is the home

of the nation. I can recall a visit made to a home which was not in any sense palatial, where the old-fashioned father every morning and evening read his Bible, knelt in prayer with his household about him, commended to God his children each by name, presented the servants at the throne of grace, and then sang with them all one of the sweet hymns of the church; and from the morning prayer they went forth to the day of victory, while from the evening prayer they went to sleep the undisturbed sleep of the just, with the angels of heaven keeping watch over them.

I recall another home in the State of Ohio where the father and mother were scarcely known outside of their own county. The size of their farm was ten acres, but they reared two boys and two girls whose mission has been world-wide and whose names are known wherever the church of Christ is known and wherever the English language is spoken. These, in the truest sense, are the homes of the nation, and such homes give us men and women as true as steel.

Napoleon once was asked, "What is the greatest need of the French nation?" He hesitated a moment and then said, with marked emphasis, "The greatest need of the French nation is mothers." If you will ask me the greatest need of America I could wish in my reply that I might speak with the power of a Napoleon and that my words might live as long, for I would say, the greatest need of the American nation to-day is homes; not palatial buildings, but homes where Christ is honored, where God is loved, and where the Bible is studied.

A returned missionary, who had been for twenty-five years away from his home because he would not accept his furloughs, was asked after he had been in California for a little season what impressed him the most after his absence of a quarter of a century. The reporter expected him to say that he was impressed with the telephone system which bound houses and cities together, or that he was amazed at the wireless telegraphy, by means of which on the wave currents of the air messages were sent from one city to another; but the returned missionary expressed no such surprise. He said, "When I went away from America almost every home had its family altar; now that I have returned I have watched very carefully and find that a family altar in a home is the exception and not the rule." Wherever this is true there is real cause for great alarm, for in proportion as the home fails the nation is in danger.

Hezekiah had been sick unto death. The word of the Lord by the mouth of the Prophet came to him, saying, "Set thy house in order, for thou must die." Then he recovered for a season. The King of Babylon sent messengers to him, and when the messengers had gone Isaiah asked him the question of the text, "What have they seen in thy house?"

The dearest and most sacred spot on earth is home. Around it are the most sacred associations, about it cluster the sweetest memories. The buildings are not always palatial, the furnishings are not always of the best, but when the home is worthy of the name ladders are let down from heaven to those below, the angels of God come down, bringing heaven's blessing and ascend, taking earth's crosses. Such a home is the dearest spot on earth, because there your father worked and your mother loved. There is no love which surpasses this.

Some years ago, when the English soldiers were fighting and a Scotch regiment came to assist, the Scotchmen, strangely enough, began to die in great numbers. The skill of the physicians was baffled. They could not tell why it was that there seemed to be such a rapid falling away of the men. But at last they discovered the cause. The Scotch pipers were playing the tunes that reminded the Scotchman of the heather and the hills, and they were dying of homesickness. When the music was changed the deaths in

such large numbers almost instantly ceased.

We are drifting away from our old-fashioned homes; fathers have grown too busy, mothers have delegated their God-given work to others. We have lost instead of gained. Wherever the homes are full of weakness the government is in danger. The homes of our country are so many streams pouring themselves into the great current of moral and social life. If the home life is pure, then all is pure. I stand with that company of people today who believe that we are at the beginning of a great revival of religion, and I am persuaded that this revival is to be helped on not so much by preaching, though that is not to be ignored; nor by singing, though that in itself is useful; but it is to be helped or hindered by the condition of the homes in our land.

I

I have a friend, George R. Stuart, who says that when God himself would start a nation he made home life the deciding question. He selected Abraham as the head of the home, and in Genesis, the eighteenth chapter and the nineteenth verse, he gives the reason for this in these words: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him."

There are two great principles which must prevail in every home:

First: Authority, suggested by the word "command."

Second: Example, suggested by the expression, "He will command his children and his household after him."

In order that one may rightly command he must himself be controlled or be able to obey an authority higher than his own. It is absolutely impossible for one to be the father he ought to be and not be a Christian, or to be worthy of the name of mother and not yield allegiance to Jesus Christ. If we are to set before those about us a right example, we cannot begin too soon. Your children are a reproduction of yourself, weakness in them is weakness in yourself, strength in them is but the reproduction of your own virtue.

A convention of mothers met some years ago in the city of Cincinnati and was discussing the question as to when one ought properly to begin to train the child for Christ. One mother said, "I begin at six"; another suggested seven as the proper age; another said, "I begin when my child takes his first step, and thus point him to Christ, or when he speaks his first word I teach him the name of Jesus." Finally an old saint arose and said, "You are all of you wrong; the time to begin to train the child is the generation before the child is born," and this we all know to be true.

But the responsibility does not rest simply upon mothers; fathers cannot ignore their God-given position. Judge Alton B. Parker and his favorite grandson, Alton Parker Hall, five years old, narrowly escaped death by drowning in the Hudson River. For half an hour the two played in the water. Then Judge Parker took the boy for a swim into deep water. Placing the boy on his back, he swam around for awhile, and then, deciding to float, turned over, seating the boy astride his chest. In this manner the judge floated a distance from the wharf before noticing it. Then he attempted to turn over again, intending to swim nearer the shore. In the effort to transfer the boy to his back the little fellow became frightened and tightly clasped the judge about the neck. Judge Parker called to the boy to let go his hold, but the youth only held on the tighter, and, frightened at the evident distress of the judge, began to whimper. In a few moments the grasp

of the boy became so tight that Judge Parker could not breathe. He tried to shake the boy loose, and then attempted to break his grasp. The boy held on with the desperation of death, however, and every effort of the judge only plunged them both beneath the choking waves. With his last few remaining breaths, Judge Parker gave up the struggle and shouted for assistance. The mistake that the distinguished man made was that he went too far from shore with the boy. There are too many men to-day who are doing the same thing. They are going out too far in social life, they are too lax in the question of amusements, they are too thoughtless on the subject of dissipation. Some day they will stop, themselves recovering, but their boys will be gone.

Example counts for everything in a home. If there is any blessing in my own life or others, if there has been any helpfulness in my ministry to others, I owe it all to my mother, who lived before me a consistent Christian life and died giving me her blessing; and to my father, who with his arms about me one day said, "My son, if you go wrong it will kill me." I was at one time under the influence of a boy older than myself and cursed with too much money. I had taken my first questionable step at least, and was on my way one night to a place which was at least questionable if not sinful. I had turned the street corner and ahead of me was the very gate to hell. Suddenly, as I turned, the face of my father came before me and his words rang in my very soul. If my father had been anything but a consistent Christian man I myself, I am sure, would have been far from the pulpit, and might have been in the lost world. There are those who seem to think that the height of one's ambition is to amass a fortune, to build a palace or to acquire a social position. My friend, George R. Stuart, says you may build your palaces, amass your fortunes, provide for the satisfaction of every desire, but as you sit amid these luxurious surroundings waiting for the staggering steps of a son, or as you think of a wayward daughter, all this will be as nothing, for there is nothing that can give happiness to the parents of Godless, wayward children. Some one has said, "Every drunkard, every gambler, every lost woman once sat in a mother's lap, and the downfall of the most of them may be traced to some defect in home life."

The real purpose of every home is to shape character for time and eternity. The home may be one of poverty, the cross of self-sacrifice may be required, suffering may sometimes be necessary, but wherever a home fulfills this purpose it is overflowing with joy. One of my friends has drawn the following picture which he says is fanciful, but which I think is absolutely true to life:

Back in the country there is a boy who wants to go to a college and get an education. They call him a book-worm. Wherever they find him--in the barn or in the house--he is reading a book. "What a pity it is," they say, "that Ed cannot get an education!" His father, work as hard as he will, can no more than support the family by the products of the farm. One night Ed has retired to his room and there is a family conference about him. The sisters say, "Father, I wish you would send Ed to college; if you will we will work harder than we ever did, and we will make our old dresses do." The mother says, "Yes, I will get along without any hired help; although I am not as strong as I used to be, I think I can get along without any hired help." The father says, "Well, I think by husking corn nights in the barn I can get along without any assistance." Sugar is banished from the table, butter is banished from the plate. That family is put down on rigid, yea, suffering, economy that the boy may go to college. Time passes on. Commencement day has come and the professors walk in on the stage in their long gowns and their classic but absurd hats. The interest of the occasion is passing on, and after a while it comes to a climax of interest as the valedictorian is introduced. Ed has studied so hard and worked so well that he has had the honor conferred upon him. There are rounds of applause, sometimes breaking into vociferation. It is a great day for Ed. But away back in the galleries are his sisters in their old plain hats and faded clothes, and the

old-fashioned father and mother; dear me, she has not had a new hat for six years; he has not had a new coat for a longer time. They rise and look over on the platform, then they laugh and they cry, and as they sit down, their faces grow pale, and then are very flushed. Ed gets the garlands and the old-fashioned group in the gallery have their full share of the triumph. They have made that scene possible, and in the day that God shall more fully reward self-sacrifice made for others, he will give grand and glorious recognition. "As his part is that goeth down to battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff."

This experience describes a home in the truest sense of the word better than all the palaces the world has ever known where love is lacking and the spirit of God is gone.

II

There are two great forces in every home. I speak of the father and the mother, not but that the children have their part in either making or breaking a household, but these two are the mightiest of agencies.

The mother stands first. There are certain things which must be true of every mother. She must be a Christian. The father may fail if he must, but let the mother fail and God pity the children. She must be consistent. The children may forget the inconsistencies of the father but when the mother fails the impression is lasting as time and almost as lasting as eternity. She must be prayerful. I do not know of anything that lifts so many burdens or puts upon the face such a look of beauty as the spirit of prayer. And she must study her Bible. When we pray we talk with God, but when we read the Bible God talks with us and every mother needs his counsel.

A poor young man stood before a judge in a great court to be sentenced to death. When asked if he had anything to say, he bowed his head and said, "Oh, your honor, if I had only had a mother!"

A mother's love is unfailing. When I was in Atlanta, Georgia, in October, 1904, a little girl and an old mother came to see the governor. They had met on the train, and the child agreed to take the old lady to see the governor of the State. They entered the governor's office and she spoke as follows:

"I want to see the governor," was the straightforward request of the little lady addressed to Major Irwin, the private secretary to the governor, as he inquired her errand.

"That is the governor standing there. He will see you in a moment," replied the major, indicating Governor Terrell standing in the group. The governor went over to her. "What can I do for you, dear?" he asked. Throwing back her curls she opened wide her baby brown eyes and said:

"Governor, it is not for me; it is for this old lady. Her name is Mrs. Hackett, and she wants to talk to you about pardoning her boy." This was said by a little lady of eleven, who spoke with all the grace and savoir-faire of a woman twice her age.

In a voice choked with emotion, Mrs. Hackett began her tearful, scarcely audible story and presented her petition for clemency for her boy.

"Governor, have mercy on me," she began, and threw back her bonnet, showing a face wrinkled by age and furrowed and drawn by suffering, "and give me back my boy."

Breaking down under the strain of talking to the governor, whom she had planned for months to see, the pleading mother gave way to her grief. The governor was visibly moved, and continued to stroke the curly

hair of Mrs. Hackett's little guide. "Give me back my boy. I am an old woman, going on seventy-nine, and I cannot be here long. I know I am standing with one foot in the grave, and I do want to hear my boy, my baby, say to me, 'Ma, I'm free.' Let me go down on my knees to you and beg that you have mercy on a mother's breaking heart. During the last month I picked five hundred pounds of cotton and made two dollars to get here to see you. I got here without a cent, and this little angel gave me a dollar--her all. I don't care if I have to walk back home, for I've seen you and told you of my boy."

With unsteady voice the governor told her the law, and referred her gently to the prison commission, assuring her that they would give her petition the most considerate attention. I am told that when the books were examined the crime was found to be one of the blackest on the calendar, and yet the mother loved him.

Her love always stimulates love. It lasts when everything else fails. A man cannot wander so far from God as to forget his mother, or go so deep in sin as to be unmindful of her sweet influence.

The following is a sketch, full of touching interest, of a little ragged newsboy who had lost his mother. In the tenderness of his affection for her he was determined that he would raise a stone to her memory. His mother and he had kept house together and they had been all to each other, but now she was taken, and the little fellow's loss was irreparable. Getting a stone was no easy task, for his earnings were small; but love is strong. Going to a cutter's yard and finding that even the cheaper class of stones was far too expensive for him, he at length fixed upon a broken shaft of marble, part of the remains of an accident in the yard, and which the proprietor kindly named at such a low figure that it came within his means. There was much yet to be done, but the brave little chap was equal to it.

The next day he conveyed the stone away on a little four-wheeled cart, and managed to have it put in position. The narrator, curious to know the last of the stone, visited the cemetery one afternoon, and he thus describes what he saw and learned:

"Here it is," said the man in charge, and, sure enough, there was our monument, at the head of one of the newer graves. I knew it at once. Just as it was when it left our yard, I was going to say, until I got a little nearer to it and saw what the little chap had done. I tell you, boys, when I saw it there was something blurred my eyes, so's I couldn't read it at first. The little man had tried to keep the lines straight, and evidently thought that capitals would make it look better and bigger, for nearly every letter was a capital. I copied it, and here it is; but you want to see it on the stone to appreciate it:

MY MOTHER SHEE DIED LAST WEAK SHEE WAS ALL I HAD. SHEE SED SHEAD BEE WAITING FUR--

and here the boy's lettering stopped. After awhile I went back to the man in charge and asked him what further he knew of the little fellow who brought the stone. "Not much," he said; "not much. Didn't you notice a fresh little grave near the one with the stone? Well, that's where he is. He came here every afternoon for some time working away at that stone, and one day I missed him, and then for several days. Then the man came out from the church that had buried the mother and ordered the grave dug by her side. I asked if it was for the little chap. He said it was. The boy had sold all his papers one day, and was hurrying along the street out this way. There was a runaway team just above the crossing, and--well--he was run over, and lived but a day or two." He had in his hand when he was picked up an old file sharpened down to a point, that he did all the lettering with. They said he seemed to be thinking only of that until he died, for he kept saying, "I didn't get it done, but she'll know I meant to finish it, won't she? I'll tell her so, for she'll be

waiting for me," and he died with those words on his lips. When the men in the cutter's yard heard the story of the boy the next day, they clubbed together, got a good stone, inscribed upon it the name of the newsboy, which they succeeded in getting from the superintendent of the Sunday school which the little fellow attended, and underneath it the touching words: "He loved his mother."

God pity the mother with such an influence as this if she is leading in the wrong direction!

It is necessary also to say just a word about the father. There are many pictures of fathers in the Bible. Jacob gives us one when he cries, "Me ye have bereft of my children."

David gives another when he cries, "O Absalom, my son." The father of the Prodigal adds a new touch of beauty to the picture when he calls for the best robe to be put upon his boy. I allow no one to go beyond me in paying tribute to a mother's love, but I desire in some special way to pay tribute to the devotion and consistency of a father.

There are special requisites which must be made without which no father can maintain his God-given position. He must be a Christian. I rode along a country road with my little boy some time ago. I found that he was speaking to my friends just as I spoke to them. One man called my attention to it and said, "It is amusing, isn't it?" To me it was anything but amusing. If my boy is to speak as I speak, walk as I walk, then God help me to walk as a Christian.

He must be a man of prayer. No man can bear the burdens of life or meet its responsibilities properly if he is a stranger to prayer.

He must be a man of Bible study. One of the most priceless treasures I have is a Bible my father studied, the pages of which he turned over and over, and which I never used to read without a great heart throb.

"I con its pages o'er and o'er; Its interlinings mark a score
Of promises most potent, sweet, In verses many
of each sheet; Albeit the gilding dull of age,
And yellow-hued its every page, No book more precious e'er
may be Than father's Bible is to me.

"Its tear-stained trace fresh stirs my heart
The corresponding tear to start; Of trials, troubles herein
brought, For comfort never vainly sought,
For help in sorest hour of need, For love to crown the daily
deed, No book more precious e'er may be
Than father's Bible is to me."

He must also erect in his house a family altar. I know that many business men will say this is impossible, but it is not impossible. If your business prevents your praying with your children, then there must be something wrong with your business. If your life prevents it, then you ought to see to it that your life is made right and that quickly.

My friend, George R. Stuart, one of the truest men I know, gave me the following picture of a Christian home. He said: "When I was preaching in Nashville, at the conclusion of my sermon a Methodist preacher came up and laid his hand upon my shoulder and said, 'Brother Stuart, how your sermon to-day carried me back to my home! My father was a local preacher, and the best man I ever saw. He is gone to heaven now. We have a large family; mother is still at home, and I should like to see all the children together once more and have you come and dedicate our home to God, while we all rededicate ourselves to God before precious old mother leaves. If you will come with me, I will gather all the family together next Friday for that purpose.' I consented to go. The old home was a short distance from the city of Nashville. There were a large number of brothers and sisters. One was a farmer; one was a doctor; one was a real estate man;

one was a bookkeeper; one was a preacher; and so on, so that they represented many professions of life. The preacher brother took me out to the old home, where all the children had gathered. As we drove up to the gate I saw the brothers standing in little groups about the yard, whittling and talking. Did you never stand in the yard of the old home after an absence of many years, and entertain memories brought up by every beaten path and tree and gate and building about the old place? I was introduced to these noble-looking men who, as the preacher brother told me, were all members of churches, living consistent Christian lives, save the younger boy, who had wandered away a little, and the real object of this visit was to bring him back to God.

"The old mother was indescribably happy. There was a smile lingering in the wrinkles of her dear old face. We all gathered in the large, old-fashioned family room in the old-fashioned semicircle, with mother in her natural place in the corner. The preacher brother laid the large family Bible in my lap and said, 'Now, Brother Stuart, you are in the home of a Methodist preacher; do what you think best.'

"I replied, 'As I sit to-day in the family of a Methodist preacher, let us begin our service with an old-fashioned experience meeting. I want each child, in the order of your ages, to tell your experience.' The oldest arose and pointed his finger at the oil portrait of his father, hanging on the wall, and said in substance about as follows: 'Brother Stuart, there is the picture of the best father God ever gave a family. Many a time he has taken me to his secret place of prayer, put his hand on my head, and prayed for his boy. And at every turn of my life, since he has left me, I have felt the pressure of his hand on my head, and have seen the tears upon his face, and have heard the prayers from his trembling lips. I have not been as good a man since his death as I ought to have been, but I stand up here to-day to tell you and my brothers and sisters and my dear old mother that I am going to live a better life from this hour until I die.' Overcome with emotion, he took his seat, and the children in order spoke on the same line. Each one referred to the place of secret prayer and the father's hand upon the head. At last we came to the youngest boy, who, with his face buried in his hands, was sobbing and refused to speak. The preacher brother very pathetically said, 'Buddy, say a word; there is no one here but the family, and it will help you.'

"He arose, holding the back of his chair, and looked up at me and said, 'Brother Stuart, they tell me that you have come to dedicate this home to God; but my old mother here has never let it get an inch from God. They tell you that this meeting is called that my brothers and sisters may dedicate their lives to God, but they are good. I know them. I am the only black sheep in this flock. Every step I have wandered away from God and the life of my precious father, I have felt his hand upon my head and heard his blessed words of prayer. To-day I come back to God, back to my father's life, and so help me God, I will never wander away again.'

"Following his talk came a burst of sobbing and shouting, and I started that old hymn, 'Amazing grace (how sweet the sound!) that saved a wretch like me!' etc., and we had an old-fashioned Methodist class-meeting, winding up with a shout. As I walked away from that old homestead I said in my heart, 'It is the salt of a good life that saves the children.' A boy never gets over the fact that he had a good father."

"What have they seen in thy house?" If we are to help our children for time and eternity, our homes must be better, our lives must be truer, our ambition to do God's will must be supreme. When these conditions are met it will be possible for us to answer the question of the text.

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