

“Raising Christ-Centered Families in a Self-Centered World”

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Old Testament Reading:

Ruth 1:3-18

A man was working for the census bureau in the hills of Arkansas. He came to one ramshackle home, knocked on the door and was greeted by a young girl. The interviewer asked the girl, "Is your mom home?"

She said, "Nah, she run off with a moon shiner."

The man continued, "Is your father home?"

"Nah," she replied, "He pokes his head in oncet a month to take a bath."

The frustrated guy said, "Do you have an older sister?"

"Yep", she replied.

"Well, is she home?"

"Nope, she's in jail fer shooting the sheriff."

"Well, do you have an older brother?"

"Yep."

The guy said, "Well then, is he home?"

She said, "Nah, he's at Harvard."

The man was astonished. "Harvard? What's he studying?"

The girl said, "Nuthin'. They're studyin' him!"

Not your typical family, right? Perhaps it's more typical than we want to admit. I can think of a few members of my extended family that Harvard might like to analyze.

People have always wanted to be normal, and to say that they come from normal families. And yet we live in a world in which it is increasingly difficult to know what normal is. It seems that normal is what I want it to be. Especially in America, what the individual wants seems to trump the norms and needs of society at every turn. For us Christians, the task is getting harder as we seek to raise Christ-centered families in this self-centered world.

Think about TV families. We've gone from "Father Knows Best" and "Dick Van Dyke" to "Family Guy" and "Two And A Half Men." The images we see of family life bear little resemblance to the lessons on family found in the Bible. Rather than living for the welfare of others, families now are collections of individuals around whom the world is supposed to revolve.

Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman wrote with real insight in The Boston Globe: "Americans once expected parents to raise their children in accordance with the dominant cultural messages. Today they are expected to raise their children in opposition to them. Once, the chorus of cultural values was full of ministers, teachers, neighbors, leaders. They demanded more conformity, but offered more support.

Now the messengers are violent cartoon characters, rappers and sports celebrities selling sneakers. Parents are considered 'responsible' only if they are successful in their resistance. That's what makes child-rearing harder. It's not just that American families have less time with their kids; it's that we have to spend more of this time doing battle with our own culture."

We do have a battle. The worldview today is that there is no absolute truth and thus we ought to experiment with a little of everything. Just Friday, I was speaking with a father of three young daughters. We were talking football games and he said how scary it is to see what goes on among groups of students during the games. How can he protect them, he wondered.

How do we protect our families? How do we raise Christ-centered families in a world that says taking care of ourselves matters more than sacrificing self for others? God's Word is where we

must begin. Only the Bible lays out the principles for creating Christ-centered homes. [Not that we need his opinion, but this is exactly the sentiment of one of America's top authorities on families, psychologist and columnist, John Rosemond. For him, the Bible is THE resource for husband-wife and parent-child relationships. In fact, he named his 2007 bestseller after the Bible. Check out "Parenting by the Book." [By the way, John Rosemond is speaking in Hickory next **Saturday - Sept. 20** at Christ Church - Mountain View, 2416 Zion Church Road, Hickory, NC 28602. Call 828-294-6858.]

So we turn to the Bible to find our way as we seek to nurture families that put Jesus first. 1 Peter 1 reminds us of where it all begins, in a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

New Testament Reading:

1 Peter 1:13-25

A prayer partner of mine asked me a long time ago, "When your wife looks at you does she see you as Jesus?"

I responded with some glib comment like, "Ginger would never mistake me for Jesus."

To which my prayer partner responded with, "She should. Scripture says that our objective as Christians is to become like Jesus. When people look at us, especially our closest companions in life, they should see a family resemblance."

So what does our family see in us? Whether you are single seeking to follow Jesus in your household of one, or a father, mother or child, ask yourself these questions [bookmark]:

1. Because of me, are the people in my household closer to God or more distant?
2. Can my family see that doing God's will is the most important priority in my life?
3. Does our family take time each day to read and discuss God's Word? What can I do to make this a greater priority?
4. Does our family pray together at least once a day in addition to mealtime?
5. Is our family ministering to others who are needy, lonely, and struggling, or are we self-sufficient and isolated from those who Christ came to serve?
6. Does our family talk to one another in loving tones as though we appreciate and value each other?

Easy answers: yes or no, but the real test comes daily, when we have to choose to live like Jesus or follow the world.

I want us to zoom in on 1 Peter 1:17-19: *"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."*

1. "Live...in reverent fear" [v.17]

The Greek word is "phobo," which we know as phobia, fear of something. And that is the meaning here. We are to live our lives in reverence before God, fearful that we will somehow decide that we can trust ourselves more than God.

Do you know what the number one problem in American families is? **We don't have the right fears.** We fear all sorts of things in life, and have a million drugs to treat those fears and phobias, but they aren't what we should really fear. We need to develop a healthy fear of ourselves and our natural inclination to sin. We will never fear ourselves until we truly fear God. Fear of God is what the Bible calls reverence for God. We've lost a fear of God. We've changed "In God we trust" to "In

me I trust.” And it isn’t working. If we want families that honor Christ, we have to rediscover reverent fear.

This leads to a second thing to notice in these verses.

2. “For you know that it was not with perishable things...that you were redeemed...” [v.18]

Want to see another major problem with American family life? We have an upside down understanding of freedom. We’ve come to think that we are set free from the emptiness of life by the things of this world. If I make more money, I’ll have more time to spend with my family. But by the time I make enough money to spend time with my family, they’ve either grown up or grown away.

Money, worldly achievements, the silver and gold of this world, these do not bring purpose and meaning to a family. **Family is about eternal blood relations, not how much we’ve gathered in the days of our lives.** We have to relearn what every Christian should know, it is NOT the stuff of this world that sets a family free from emptiness. It is the blood of Jesus that frees us to abundant living!

And that is the third thing to notice in Peter’s words.

3. “For you know that it was...with the precious blood of Christ [that you were redeemed.]” [v. 19]

Blood. That is the mark of true family. But family is not the blood flowing through our veins, as wonderful a connection as that can be. Rather true, alive, abundant family is discovered in Jesus Christ, as His Blood washes over us and unites in the Holy Spirit.

Take our family. It is fact that Rob, Ginger, Frazer and Will are an American family. By North Carolina law, Ginger and I are married. By the laws of nature, Frazer and Will are our sons. But it is not those laws and regulations that make us a family. We are family and we are set free from an empty way of life by the blood of Jesus that he shed for us on the Cross.

Christ’s blood purifies and unifies our life together. His blood is God’s love for us that allows us to love one another. When the blood of Christ washes us clean, the Truth of God’s Word is written on our hearts for eternity. Only Jesus’ blood can make us a Christ-centered family in a self-centered world.

Remember all the pictures of the Great Wall of China during the Olympics? It was a massive wall built by the labor of millions of Chinese in an effort to keep out the barbaric hordes of the north. The wall was so high they believed no one could climb over it and so thick nothing could break it down.

During the first 100 years that the wall stood, China was invaded 3 times. Not once did the barbaric hordes break down the wall or climb over it. Each time they bribed a gatekeeper and marched right through the gates.

One Chinese sage observed: “We were so busy relying on walls of stone we forgot to teach integrity to our children.” We, too, can get so busy in our homes trying to keep the world out that we forget to teach our children and ourselves about true integrity. True soundness comes only in the blood of Jesus.

Raising a Christ-centered family is not about trying to keep the world out. It will come through the front door no matter what we do. What we have to do is show our families the Blood of Jesus. We have to model and teach and give freely every day the love and grace of God. Then and only then can our families see the sharp contrast between the abundant life in Jesus and the false promises and empty ways of this world. Redeemed by His blood, we can live Christ-centered instead of self-centered.

This means that we have to bring the discipline of the blood into our homes. To use an Old Testament metaphor, paint it over the doors. Put it around us like a prayer shawl. Imprint it on our hearts through scripture memorization so that it guides our thoughts and actions. It will guide us daily to live as strangers on this earth who walk in reverent fear of God.

When I remember that Jesus died to redeem my life, it puts everything else in perspective. All the stuff I get caught up in that seems so important in the moment, sports, politics, church, money, me! - all that is just the empty way of life here on earth. With Peter, we have to say, this world is not my home. I may live here... own a home here... raise my kids here... pay taxes here. But heaven is my home and I want to live looking to Jesus. Moses said it well when he prayed, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations." [Ps 90:1]

Jesus was blunt. He asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mk 8:36) We must teach one another that this world is not our home, that this world ultimately has nothing to offer us, that Jesus' blood will be the only hope that will carry us through. If we do that, we'll have a Christ-centered home. Amen.