

CHAPTER II

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

by

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In the previous chapter we dealt with the subject of Christian marriage. Now I have the opportunity to inform and interact with you on another very relevant and closely related topic, namely that of the Christian family.

I. THE MODERN CONTEXT

Before we deal with our subject as such, it may be helpful for us to spend a few moments looking at the context and environment in which the Christian family of today exists. When we do that it does not take long before we must conclude that the family as a basic social unit in our society is in grave difficulties. Consider only the following:

A. The Breakdown of Marriage and The Rise of Divorce

The statistics reveal very plainly that over the last number of decades there has been an alarming increase in the number of marriages that end in divorce. For centuries marriage was consid-

ered to be a rather stable and unmovable institution. This is not to say that marriages were always hotbeds of harmony, but at least people made a concerted attempt either to work out their interpersonal difficulties or else they learned to survive and to cope. Often the reason for this was related to societal pressures, to the view that marriage was an inviolable relationship and that divorce was a scandal.

In this last part of the twentieth century, however, all that has changed. Marriage is no longer universally regarded as sacred; it has come to be regarded by and large as a purely human relationship designed to meet human desires and needs. Failure to fulfill one's expectations is considered to be sufficient reason to terminate the relationship and to try again with another person, if one so desires.

And that is exactly what thousands of couples are doing every year in our country. They are opting out of their marriages and filing for divorce. In the process they are fragmenting the family unit. They are forcing siblings to choose sides. They are jeopardizing the emotional life and future of their children.

B. The Rise of Single Parent Families

What marriage breakdown and divorce are creating in turn is a relatively new social development, called "the single parent family". Such families currently represent approximately 20% of the total and the number is growing. Whether they can really be termed a family in the normal sense of the word is and remains a valid question. In any case, as marriages rupture, the question naturally arises, "What about the kids? Who is going to get custody?" More often than not, it's the mother who is awarded the daily care of the children. This is due to a number of factors: the refusal of the father to be bothered with them, the built-in assumption that mothers are better suited for caring and nurturing,

the premise that fathers normally go out to work; whereas, mothers stay at home.

But regardless of all that, the point is that many families today live in that strange situation where mother is left with her children and has to be all things to her offspring: she has to raise them, to feed them, to discipline them, to provide for them, to lead them. She has to be both mother and father. She has to try to give her children as normal a childhood as possible. Often she has to do this with insufficient financial resources. In short, she has to do it all, and to do it alone. Most fathers cop out. Most become the weekend or part-time entertainers of their children. Father gets to take them out and show them a good time. He gets to project a positive image. Meanwhile, mother is the ogre. She has to deal with them every day, with all of their moods and tantrums, to say "no" and to get them to conform to the rules of the home (if there are any).

C. The Increase in Juvenile Crime

That mothers can often not cope under such circumstances becomes evident when one has a look at another set of statistics, namely those of juvenile crime. Father is not around. Mother is working or preoccupied with other things. The children, especially the teenage ones, see opportunities for mischief, and they seize them. They come home from school, find no one home, raid the fridge, look at the soaps, get bored and hit the streets.

There is no structure in their life outside of the classroom and so they make their own. Teenage gangs are growing at an enormous rate in our cities and towns. How come? They are filling a vacuum, the vacuum of an empty home, a broken home, or both. Gangs are family; father and mother, brother and sister all rolled up into one. They have structure, rules, standards, codes. They impart a sense of belonging and security.

Are the youth of today worse than the youth of yesteryear? There is no proof to support such an assertion. What is true, however, is that young people today face more pressures and are subject to more temptations. At the same time they often have fewer support mechanisms to fall back on. Many have no father. Many have a mother, but she can barely function economically, emotionally, physically. Rootlessness, confusion and boredom set in. And their antidotes? Booze, drugs, sex and pranks.

D. The Emergence of Sexual and Violent Abuse

In countless homes then we have a situation in which mother is under great pressure and she is also lonely. She needs a man around, and often almost any man will do. Once you've been rejected by a man or shed one, it is easier to go on to the next. Only it is not necessarily easier to hang on to him. A basic insecurity underlies so many of the live-in relationships today. And it is an insecurity which is covered up with partying and alcohol consumption.

This in turn sets the stage for the next scene, namely - family violence. Insecure, frustrated, normless people find their peace in the bottle and their courage when under the influence. Then they deal with their frustrations, and often it are wives and children who end up on the receiving end. Battered wives and battered children have become symptomatic of our affluent, rudderless society.

Nevertheless, this form of abuse is not the only one. There is another which is currently receiving a great deal of attention. It is called child sexual abuse. No doubt this form of abuse has always been present in our society, even in the church. It may not have been discussed or exposed as it is today, but it was there. Fathers molesting their daughters and worse. Brothers acting improperly with their sisters. Boyfriends victimizing the brothers of their girlfriends. Unfortunately all of this is nothing new.

What is new, however, is that the problem is not only more public, it is also becoming more epidemic. Mothers find male friends to fill the vacuum and to satisfy their need for affection. When these so-called friends do not find their sexual urges satisfied, they turn elsewhere to other members of the family. Children become the means to sexual gratification. Such is often the pathetic scenario, and it is a scenario which is aided and abetted by pornography in all of its grotesque forms, as well as by drunkenness.

Need more be said? The picture is clear. The modern family is in dire straits. We shall not add to this litany of woe any further. But it does naturally raise the question, How come? What accounts for this terrible picture, that we see before our eyes almost every day and which is increasing in its severity every day as well?

II. THE CAUSES OF FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Let us examine a few of the causes.

A. The Demise of Biblical Norms

The first one must surely relate to the demise of biblical norms. Since the time of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century many have been championing the cause of reason. "Human reason" says one author, "became the foundation upon which a structure of knowledge could be built... . Enlightenment thinkers shared principles that still shape the modern mind: a new confidence in the power of human reason; a corresponding distrust of tradition; and a freedom." ¹

Humanism is the over-riding modern philosophy and it encompasses a host of lesser philosophies: pragmatism, secularism, scientism, hedonism, feminism, relativism. One of the main re-

¹ C. Colson, *Against the Night* (Ann Arbor, MI : Servant, 1991) p. 27.

sults is that man recognizes no greater authority than himself and no higher law than the law which he himself creates. The whole idea of transcendence, of a God who is greater, wiser, mightier than man, of a God who has a right to lay down the law for man, is gone. Man is his own god and he marches to the tune of his own drummer, also when it comes to the institutions of life.

Never mind that God created marriage, that He regards it as a sacred relationship mirrored in covenant, that He hates divorce, that He calls on men and women to live holy, responsible, caring and believing lives. The absolutes are out and the relatives are in.

B. The Demon Called Materialism

Still, there is another development that goes hand in hand with the rise of humanism and that is the advent of materialism. This trend has been greatly aided and abetted by the twin developments of industrialization and urbanization. Once man cuts off his line of fellowship and communication with God, he goes looking for substitutes and he believes that he has found them in the worship of the material. What matters to so many people today are not other people, but things, possessions, objects, material resources.

A man marries and grows tired of providing for his family and having to make sacrifices here and sacrifices there. Why can he not go out with the boys whenever he pleases? Why can he not play golf to his heart's content? Why can he not take this trip or buy that flashy car? Why sweat for your wife's new hairdo or your children's piano lessons? Why?

A woman grows tired of having to budget and skimp. She wants more than hubby can provide. So she launches herself into the job market and sees this as a means to obtaining life's additional goodies.

A couple get married and they have a whole long list of material wants: a new home, two good cars, nice furniture, a boat, an annual holiday to Hawaii or wherever. Soon their life revolves

no longer around each other, much less around the service of God, but around all of their materialistic concerns and goals. But alas, they wake up one morning and they discover that the honeymoon is over. Things do not generate happiness or blessings. Such a marriage and family has no glue to keep it going and to keep it together.

C. A Confusion of Roles

Another factor that should not be overlooked in the current crisis has to do with feminism and what we call role confusion. For years now the women's liberation movement has been making its inroads. And then we shall not say that there were no wrongs to be corrected and that never any benefits resulted. It is true that the feminist movement is partly a reaction to the way men have treated women and even more specifically perhaps to the way that husbands so often treat wives. Wives are not always appreciated. That of course is rather obvious from time to time. A woman works from early morning to late in the evening, they have all kind of tasks and responsibilities, from cleaning to cooking, to dressing, to buying, to organizing and accounting and teaching. And they have little free, personal time. And then the husband appears. He is not necessarily antagonistic but he can so often be downright insensitive and unmindful and ungrateful. The work of many women and wives is downgraded. Their efforts are hardly appreciated, their struggles are barely understood. The husband comes home, says "hi" to his wife and maybe he gives her a peck on her cheek and he puts his feet up and he expects his coffee and his dessert and his supper and his newspaper and everything to come rolling along! And the wife can be the maid or the gopher! Then we wonder why wives are discouraged and sometimes feel used and useless. Sometimes in the way in which husbands and wives interact we produce all kinds of recruits for the feminist movement. For if there is no sense of satisfaction at home, if wives are taken for granted and not es-

teemed, if wives are only appreciated and loved when it comes to the sexual side of life, well then they will look for meaning and significance elsewhere. Of course the feminist movement is where so many of them are looking. But it provides no cure and no solution. It makes women even more self-centered, individualistic and often act contrary to nature itself. There is no hope to be found there!

There is also that thing which we call role-confusion. If you read the books and the newspapers and you listen to reports then you ask yourself does modern man really know what is expected of him as a man, as a husband, as a father? Does a modern woman really know what is expected of her as a woman, as a wife and as a mother? The current wisdom seems to be that men have to become more feminine and that women have to become more masculine. Men should develop a soft spot for that cartoon character Adam and imitate him to a greater or lesser degree. Women should become more like their husbands: earning the money, giving the orders, and avoiding the maternal instinct.

As far as role responsibilities are concerned, it is good that God has set some natural limits in His creation, otherwise there would be total anarchy. The tendency to make all things relative and to tinker endlessly with every responsibility is creating a massive identity crisis.

D. The Impact of The Media

If modern man no longer knows what constitutes manhood and a woman no longer knows what constitutes womanhood, it is equally true that the modern media no longer knows what constitutes wholesomeness. On the one hand, it is true to say that the media of print and image has no standards. On the other hand, it is equally true to say that the media has some very definite goals. The one is financial and caters to the bottom line. The other is salesmanship and goes out of its way to excite, to stimulate, to

titillate, to arouse. In order to achieve that standard almost anything is permissible - violence, horror, or fornication.

Some time ago I was on my way to the church in order to teach the Catechism Classes and I was listening to CBC-FM. Rather respectable stuff - right? Well, the first item I heard had to do with an art exhibit in Cincinnati which had landed the museum directors in court because it showed pictures of sex with minors; the next had to do with a new movie, all about Arthur Miller and his love life with more than one partner. Now it was an education in itself, and a rather disgusting one at that, to hear the reviewers going out of their way to describe immorality - what the Bible would call fornication - as art. That which repulses even the most hardened of men is today an art form to be applauded and promoted.

E. The Role of Government

As if all of these factors were not enough to send the family unit into a tailspin, there is also the involvement of government. There are many who say that it is not the business of government to legislate morality and that government should get out of the bedrooms of the nation à la Pierre E. Trudeau!

Now it is true that the government as such can not change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, no matter how many laws it passes in either of the official languages. But it is also true that governments are not allowed to let everything in life slide. The Belgic Confession reminds us in Article 36 that the government is there in order that "the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order."

But is the government doing that? Is it restraining evil and promoting good? Is it supportive of the family and enacting legislation which promotes marriage, protects the family and benefits the homes of the nation? Our response to government policy as it relates to the family can only be one of dismay. The laws which govern marriage and divorce have been simplified to such an

extent that a marriage can now be terminated faster than a mortgage can be approved. The absence of any abortion legislation offers no real protection for the "unborn". Tax laws remain insensitive to families and to mothers as homemakers. Subsidies are available to single parents needing day care but there is no recognition that it is in the nation's larger benefit to have mothers caring for their children at home.

In short, public policy has done more to undermine than upgrade the families of the nation. The leaders of the nation are offering no leadership.

III. THE ANSWER TO FAMILY BREAKDOWN

All in all, the picture is clear, but it is not pretty. "But that" you say, "is the world, what about the church? Is the climate any better there?" On the whole we can say with great thankfulness that our churches often represent an island of tranquillity in a sea of tumult. Compared to the world we have very few cases of marriage breakdown. Most of our families are stable and functioning. Many of our young people are following in the footsteps of committed fathers and mothers.

A. Be Realistic

Still, let such an assessment not blind us to the dangers nor to the fact that instability is creeping in. In our church community the last ten years has seen a rise in marriage problems, in family conflict situations, in instances of abuse be it physical, sexual or psychological. In short, what we need as believers with respect to the present and the future is first of all an attitude of *realism*. The church is not insulated from the world, from its fads and trends. Being an ostrich not only gives one a sore neck, it also prevents one from preparing for what is coming at us from different directions.

B. Be Hopeful

In the second place what is needed is an attitude of *hope*. When some look at the world and its trends, they shrug their shoulders and say that the church is destined automatically to go the way of the world. Soon divorce, juvenile delinquency, abuse will be common things among us too. But will they? If we take a fatalistic, passive approach, that will surely be the case. But that need not be the case. Scripture says that God gives His people strength. God is able to equip His people to meet every obstacle and influence in life. World conformity is not a matter of course. Not if we are relying upon Him and pray for His Spirit.

It is not automatic either if we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd as He speaks to us in His Word. In that Word we have all the insight and instruction, all the counsel and wisdom that we need to live, even in these threatening days.

C. Be Knowledgeable

But specifically what does the Word teach us about the family? That particular question can be answered in various ways. The most traditional way is to cite chapter and verse. It requires a tour through the Bible beginning with Genesis, the early chapters mostly, going on from there especially to Deuteronomy, to Proverbs, to the Song of Songs, to the Corinthian and Ephesian letters. It's a fine tour. It's a good tour. However, it is also a long tour and we do not have the time for it this evening.

Instead let us take a slightly different approach. Let us consider for a moment what the Bible says about the family in general and try to bring it down to some basic principles. What according to the Scriptures are *the basic characteristics of a Christian family*? Let me suggest four aspects to you.

A Recognition of Divine Authority

The first has to do with a recognition of divine authority. A strong Christian family is not a family that develops its own stan-

dards of conduct or sets its own agenda. It lets the standard and the agenda be set by the Lord God. When there are questions that need answers, conflicts that need resolution, issues that require clarity, it is not a matter ultimately of what "I think", "You think" or "We all think", but what does *God* think, and say. His Word is the guide, the arbiter, the standard which every family member must acknowledge and to which every family member must submit.

A Sense of Oneness and Unity

The second aspect has to do with a sense of oneness or unity. A strong Christian family is a family in which the members respect (love) each other and also support each other. Notice the words "respect" and "support". What this means is that two extremes are avoided. The one extreme is that situation wherein family members are so closely involved with each other's lives that they lack a sense of separate identity. They are always getting into each other's hair! They are enmeshed in each other's business and devastated by each other's problems. The other extreme is the situation in which the problems of one family member rarely touch the other members. There is a sense of disengagement present. Both are to be avoided. Rather there is to be a commitment to each other and an appreciation of each other.

A Basic Ability to Communicate

The third aspect has to do with a basic ability to communicate. Good communication, as certain authors put it, comes down to "clarity of perception and clarity of expression. Clarity of perception pertains especially to the receiver of communication. It involves good listening skills, the ability to pick up the sender's intonations and body language, and willingness to ask for clarification when needed.... clarity of expression pertains to the sender. In strong families, members are able to communicate feelings, opinions, wishes, and desires in a forthright and unam-

biguous manner."² Proper communication then should be emphasized, taught and worked on in order that it may become a functional reality producing genuine benefits. It will serve to prevent misunderstanding, help to resolve difficulties and bind the family members closer together.

A Proper Awareness of Role Structure

The fourth aspect relates to a proper awareness of role structure. This means that in a stable Christian family each member of the family has a basic awareness of his or her place, role and function. Of course for young children this awareness is something which takes time to develop; however, for the father, mother and older children this awareness should be there. In other words, father should know what the Lord expects of him in terms of leadership, love, discipline and providing for his family. There are a great many things that one can place under the heading of "fatherhood". We cannot examine everyone of those things. But if I would take only one thing and try to impress that upon the fathers in our midst, it is this: fathers, spend time with your children! A while back an experiment was done in which fathers were asked how many minutes, how much time they spent every day with their children. These fathers had always spent an average of fifteen to twenty minutes with their children. The researchers took microphones and attached them to the children in order to measure exactly how much real interaction was taking place on a daily basis. It came down to thirty-seven seconds! No one on his deathbed ever says I wish I had spent more time on my business. And therefore, fathers interact with your children! Spend time with them, do things with them and take time to teach them and to guide them and to love them. You only have them once!

² J. O. Balswick and J. K. Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) p. 47.

When it comes to mothers, we all know that mothers are charged by the Lord to do what they can in terms of assisting and nurturing and caring. Here too, there are many things that one can say about mothers and to mothers, but again just one thing! Mothers, realize that you have one of the most important tasks in all the world. You are the channel of life; you are the feeder and provider of your children; you are the key to their emotional stability with your love and presence and comfort and understanding. You are the first educator and teacher and often the best! You are so many things. Forget therefore that the world does not seem to appreciate you in these days; forget that at times even your husband may tend to ignore you and your children rebel against you. Being a mother or a housewife or as they sometimes say, a domestic engineer, is to have a key and pivotal role in society's future and the church's welfare. Your children will rise up and call you blessed. Mothers, truly appreciate who you are and what you are doing!

Children must know what the Lord expects of them in terms of obedience, helpfulness, and respect. Again many things could be discussed but we take only one. When you read the book of Proverbs does it not strike you how often the author says to the children, *listen!* My son *listen* to your mother's instruction, to your father's teaching. Listen....that sounds so easy! But for children, especially for teen-agers in those years of puberty, it is tough. And you know how it is; parents, well they are old-fashioned and they are outmoded and they are unrealistic and they are still living in the stone-age or they are overly concerned and they are pre-occupied, too protective or inhibited. As a result, parental advice is often ignored or given mere lip service. Well, such reactions, says Proverbs, lead to ruin and to great disappointments. Therefore children, whenever your parents speak out of the Word and the experiences of life, perk up your ears, concentrate your minds, weigh their words and heed them. That will lead to blessing upon blessing.

Then there is also something else. Not only being knowledgeable, and hopeful and realistic. It is also a matter of being involved.

D. Be Involved

For all of these things to advance from the world of thought and words to the world of actions and deeds requires involvement, especially on the part of the parents. Involvement in what way?

A Determination to Educate

Surely the first thing that parents have to be committed to is to the matter of educating their children. As such this educational process is a varied one.

1. educating in the Word

Primacy of place must be given to educating our children in the Word. Deuteronomy 6 speaks about the need to teach the commandments, statutes and ordinances "diligently to your children". How diligently? It says that you "shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (v.7). Such an emphasis may make us somewhat uncomfortable for I have the impression that we Reformed people are not too adept at verbally communicating God's will to our children. Evangelicals, we are told, do that much more naturally and consistently. If that is so, then it is to our shame, for it indicates that they are more in step with God's will than we are.

Indeed, if we do not make the transference of God's precepts to our children a matter of daily activity and ongoing emphasis, then we need to repent and to change. The Word calls on us to instill in our children a certain way of conduct. It calls on us to teach them the ways of wisdom (Prov. 4). It calls on us to pass on to our children God's deeds of old and the marvels of His redemption (Ps. 78).

Why? Because this is an extension and offshoot of our love for God. It is not for nothing that between "the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances" and the diligent teaching, one finds the injunction, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (v. 4,5). Love for God should drive us to teach our children in order that they too might come to love Him totally and to serve Him obediently.

2. educating for life

This education, however, does not confine itself to a certain part of life, but extends to all of it. The early Hebrews were not dualistic in their approach as if to suggest that on the Sabbath one educated for God and His service and on the rest of the days of the week one educated for self and secular pursuits. No, all of life and every occupation in life was tied to the service of the Lord. Naturally in those days a lot of the educating that related to life skills had to do with agriculture and commerce, but still it was done out of a God-centered perspective. And the same requirement exists today. As parents we educate our children for life and we send them to schools where they can be more fully educated in a manner that harmonizes with God's Word and our confession.

In this connection one can mention a couple of things that perhaps need mentioning these days. The one has to do with home-schooling. You may know that this particular trend was started in the United States some years ago because Christian parents had difficulty sending their children any longer to the secular, public schools. Because of the absence of any Christian schooling they decided to do it themselves. Today the situation seems to be changing because in both Canada and the United States there seems to be a trend developing that home-schooling somehow is an alternative to Christian schooling. Some of the arguments are that after all education is a parental responsibility according to the Bible. So they are the ones who first of all

should educate their children. Home-schooling allows mother to spend more time with the children. Also, it is more effective, because it takes place in a more natural setting. And ultimately it may be cheaper. But the question is of course, do these arguments really hold up? It is true that education is biblically speaking a parental responsibility and task, but does that mean that all parents are to see themselves and to train themselves as educators with a view to preparing their children for the work place of life. I would say that from earliest times, even in the Old Testament already, reading, writing and arithmetic were things that were taught by teachers, maybe priests, levites, prophets. Therefore parents have never done everything in that total all-encompassing sense that we are sometimes told about these days. Also, whether or not home-schooling is more effective in terms of content and building social skills is surely something debatable and to be proven. But my greatest reservation lies elsewhere. If I look around for example in the congregation which I serve in B.C., I see many mothers, and I see also many different kind of mothers. Some mothers can teach but not all mothers can teach. Some mothers are simply too busy, others are unable to teach. In other words, this approach is something for the few. It cannot be handled by the many. The consequence is that this kind of an approach when it is perpetuated will end up weakening the schools that we have and the teaching that is taking place.

I may in this connection say something else relating to education, and that is sex education. It is another one of those gross industries that we have today. Personally I think that far too much is made of this matter. It is true, our children need to learn about the sexual side of life and as parents we have the prime duty to teach them. But that should be done naturally, progressively, both directly and indirectly. This means that human sexuality must not be presented as if it represents a secret and shameful side of life. No, teach it in a normal way. At the same time do not give your child more information than he or she asks

for or can handle. In addition, make sure that in your family library there are books about sexuality that address the various age groupings that your children are in. Finally, whenever it is deemed necessary or appropriate speak to your son or daughter about these matters on a one-to-one basis.

A Charge to Discipline

If education represents one part of a parent's duties, then discipline represents another. Any doubt about this will be quickly eradicated if a person reads the book of Proverbs. It is filled with wise advice and precious counsel on this particular matter. In addition, one can also think of a well-known passage like Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." It reminds us that children do not automatically grow up to be what God wants them to be, that discipline is not an option but a command, and that discipline has a certain purpose or goal, namely, the right responsible service of the Lord.

With respect to the precise administration of discipline, there are any number of books that can be purchased and which will prove helpful. For our purposes this evening the following guidelines will have to suffice:

1. discipline should be clear

This means that parents should set clearly defined boundaries and rules for their children in order that as many misunderstandings as possible may be avoided.

2. discipline should be fair

What we mean by this is that parents should not create new rules on the spur of the moment or change existing rules in mid-stream or toughen-up existing rules to the extreme or manufacture rules that are clearly unreasonable.

3. discipline should be corporal

While a great deal of our discipline may be of a verbal nature or entail the suspension of certain rights and privileges, there remains a role for corporal punishment. Especially at certain ages this is sometimes the only way to make an impression on a child indicating that a certain type of behaviour is definitely off-limits. When it is administered, however, it should be done with care and parental pain. All too often, as almost any parent will tell you, this form of punishment is the result of anger or rage or frustration, and that type of approach should be checked.

4. discipline should be corporate

This almost sounds like the previous point; however, it is quite different, because it refers to the fact that both father and mother should agree that it is necessary. It is extremely counter-productive if the children receive the impression that when it comes to discipline father has one standard and mother has another. When children view one parent as a "push-over" and another as a "tyrant", it undermines the very process.

5. discipline should be immediate

It may not always be possible to do so, but as much as possible parents should deal with the crime as soon as it occurs. To put off the punishment called for to another day or week is to weaken its effectiveness, as well as to unnecessarily terrorize the child.

6. discipline should be loving

Talk about a contradiction? No, we discipline our children not because we want to but because we *have* to. It is for their benefit and well-being. It is a sign of our love and concern for them. Indeed, it often causes more discomfort to the parent than to the child; nevertheless, it is a calling and such a matter is not to be avoided but obeyed.

A Call to Worship

Supplementing the matter of education and discipline is also the call to worship. Of course, worship comes in various forms: personal, family and communal, but all of them have a bearing on parents. As such parents must teach their children how to pray to the Lord and see to it that they do so on a daily basis. In addition they must stress the need for their children to read the Bible regularly for themselves. Christian parents realize that together personal prayer and personal Bible reading constitute the pillars of a rich and necessary devotional life.

Parents also have a duty to ensure that their children attend the worship services of the church on the Lord's Day, and that they participate meaningfully in terms of singing, offering, praying, and listening. A further extension of this is the calling of parents to remind their children of the need for consistency between their Sunday worship and their everyday conduct of life.

Finally, there is the matter of family worship. In many of our homes family worship in one form or another is a daily activity. We are used to the practice of praying before our meals and of reading the Bible and praying after our meals. Still, the question should always again be asked whether further improvements are not in order? What kind of improvements? Well, what about more involvement from the members of the family in terms of their taking turns to read and to pray? What about the singing of Psalms and Hymns? What about a discussion of the Bible reading? What about sermon reports and discussions on Sunday evening? What about asking for your children's input before prayer is offered? Obviously there are many ways that a good custom can be enlivened and improved upon.

A Call to Disciple

Biblically-based education, discipline and worship are, therefore, some of the signs of a strong, Christian family. But still, you may wonder how such a family becomes a reality and what

overall approach parents should take to make it one? To answer that let me present you with some different parenting styles.

1. There is a style called **neglecting**.

As you can guess from the name it represents a minimum of involvement on the part of the parents. In such a case proper behaviour is neither taught nor displayed. No direction is given to the children. They are on their own and are free to adopt any form of behaviour they like and any set of norms which suits them.

2. There is another style called **dictating**.

It is usually low in action but high in terms of content. It's the kind in which the parent says to the child, "Do as I say, but not necessarily as I do." It's usually preachy and pushy. It may be preferred to the first, but it is not a great improvement upon it. Needless to say, children are quick to catch the inconsistency in this style.

3. There is a third style called **modeling**.

It is probably the one that we most readily seek to implement because it is often held up to us as the ideal by modern educational theorists. And it may be true that this style is acceptable, however, you should also realize that it has a tendency to be high in activity but low in content. Indeed in this style effective parenting is assumed to rest almost completely on the behaviour of the parents. It goes out from the adage that children learn more through what is *caught* than through what is *taught*.

4. There is a fourth style called **disciplining**.

It is high in action *and* in content. It is word and deed teaching. It is most in line with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 6 where fathers are told both to *do* (keep, obey, implement) the statutes and to *teach* them to their children. It is based on the words of Proverbs 13:24 where it says "...but he who loves his son is careful to discipline him." The word "discipline" is, of

course, closely related to the word "disciple" meaning "learner, pupil". The Lord Jesus uses it too when He speaks about the task of the church to "make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:19); but it can also be used to refer to the giving of positive guidance to one's children.

It will be clear by now that my preference is for the last style. It alone seems to balance out and incorporate the basic requirements of Christian parenting. Telling one's children what to believe and how to act may be laudable but the credibility of the parents becomes suspect when father and mother do not live it themselves. Likewise parents may tell their children to follow their example, but if that example is not firmly rooted in biblical teaching it may well be a misguided one. Hence there is this need to bring together faith and life, teaching and acting, theory and practice.

And let us strive to do that, namely to be faithful disciples ourselves and to disciple our children in the ways of the Lord as well. As a parent I am very much aware of the fact that this is not an easy calling. Last time I mentioned that marriage has its stages, and parents, children and families experience them too. Some we can cope with, others seem to push us to the limits. At times we are up to the task but on many other occasions we are not. Thankfully we do not labour alone but we have the Lord and His great promises and His Holy Spirit to spur us on. His forgiveness, His strength, His wisdom, His guidance, His grace are always near and needed. Look to Him, learn from Him, lean on Him and live for Him and you and your family will not be disappointed but experience His blessings.

RESPONSE BY REV. D. G. J. AGEMA

I would like to express my appreciation for the contribution of Dr. Visscher. In his speech he covers quite some territory. I realize that not every topic can be dealt with in detail. My contribution can therefore be considered a supplement to this speech.

The family is the backbone of God's covenant and church

As Dr. Visscher indicated in his speech, to speak knowledgeably about the Christian family we must start from God's Word. In Scripture the foundation of the Christian family is the 5th commandment, "You shall honour your father and your mother." The structure of the family is not thought up by man, but is a gift of God. It pleases God to rule us by their (parents') hands (Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 39).

In the one law of God we distinguish two parts, how I have to serve God and what duties I owe to my neighbour. This distinction within the law is of value. The first four commandments deal with how we must serve God, that is our relationship to Him, and in the next six our thankfulness to God comes out in relations with others. These two parts are closely related. As one of the reasons for the demise of the family in our society Dr. Visscher pointed to the unfaithfulness to God and His church.

It should not escape our attention therefore that the first relation in this second part is the relationship between parents and children. The first relationship after the relationship to God is the one with my parents, or with my children. The God who has life in Himself, gives life to us through the parents. The parents are, as it were, the channels through which God gives us life.

This close connection tells us something of the place of the family in His plan of redemption: it is the hinge on which the covenant turns. God uses the relation between parents and children to gather His people. You see this for example in the genealogies of the Old Testament. We identify a person by name and address. A person in the Old Testament was known by his family, by father and grandfathers. This sense of unity with the previous generations was so strong that even when one died it was said he was gathered to his fathers.³

Still today, in Christ, the family is the backbone of God's covenant and the gathering of His church. In this connection I would like to make a few comments about Psalm 78 which Dr. Visscher referred to as well. Asaph had concerns about the future, how will the church continue to serve God? The answer is, when the youth understands the history of the church. The children have to understand the history of which they are part. The task of the parent is not just to tell the child about "the Lord Jesus", but to speak about God's work of redemption in Christ in the history of the Covenant. They must show to their children the deformation of the church and God's patience and reformation.⁴

Seeing this close connection between family, covenant and church, then the practice of home schooling where our own school is available is in my opinion not a positive development.

The office of parents is God-given

The office of parents is one assigned by God Himself. God puts both parents and children in their positions. You find this also in Ephesians 6. The relationship between parents and children is one in the Lord. God in Christ gives the parents the task to teach and discipline their children. He gives children the task to submit. It is not physical strength that gains parents the respect of

³ John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987) p. 290.

⁴ H.J. Schilder, *Het Kerkschip Biedt Behouden Vaart* (Kampen: Vandenberg, 1981) pp. 285, 286.

the children. It is not because what parents say makes sense, that I must obey. It is because God assigns the task.

In order to fulfill our task as parents and children we must realize our task comes from God. I may not say, I do not want to do this, nor, I cannot do this. When God calls He also gives the ability to fulfill His mandate. We do not have to live up to the ideals of others. It is before God we stand, both as parents and children.

Importance of worship

From this point of view one can hardly overestimate the importance of the worship in the family. Perhaps, the picture which Dr. Visscher gives is even yet too positive. My experience is that the family worship is in decline. How often do we as families pray together and read or sing together? How much time do we spend preparing for study society and speaking to our children? Our families are indeed under constant attack. The media want to set the agenda of our families. Communication between members of a family becomes less and less, with the result that the communication with God also becomes less and less. In addition to the items mentioned by Dr. Visscher I like to mention our social life. We are always on the go. By going out much, you easily avoid or lose time just to talk together. So you see families that are very outgoing, but as a family unit they function very poorly.

Mutual respect

The fact that our position as parents and children is assigned to us by God also demands respect. We must respect our parents because God places them over us. We must respect our children as God's children. Our society is one of openness. Beware that this openness does not result in disrespect. For example, etiquette as expressions of showing respect for the place that God assigns us is slowly dwindling. To me this is not a trivial matter, for if Satan can succeed in teaching the youth of the church that

authority is nothing, will they still bow before the authority of God. If Satan can succeed to tarnish the office of father, will our children still call upon their Father in heaven with confidence?

What makes a parent successful?

This leads me to one more question, What makes a parent successful? You can read all kinds of books about successful parenthood. It all sounds nice, but it does not always work. Life's realities do not often go according to the book. We have our failures and disappointments. You have your ideals as a young parent, but they do not always become reality. In fact there are many families where there are concerns because children do not go in the ways of the Lord. Parents then have the inclination to look back and from this disappointment conclude that they must have done something wrong. There are feelings of guilt. If only I had done this or that.

But are you successful as parents when you attain certain goals? Is it so that first I have to do my utmost and then I may perhaps conclude whether I am a true parent yes or no? Certainly, what we as parents do has consequences for the following generations. But I am a parent in virtue of the task given to me by Christ. No one is perfect. God demands that parents faithfully do what God wants them to do, while daily asking Him for forgiveness of their sins, and asking for God's blessing. It is by grace alone that as parents and children we may serve God. What He asks from us, He has also promised to give to us. By His Word and Spirit He provides us with the means to fulfill our task.

DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

1. *How do parents deal with children that break with the church? And live common-law? Should they be welcome at home? By themselves or with their partner?*

Visser: This is a difficult question which I think probably more parents are faced with than we realize. I don't think I have any quick or easy answer! You can of course generalize very easily, but in the process you may do more harm than good. I do think that parents have to address for themselves the question how they are going to deal and cope with children who walk away from the service of the Lord, who no longer attend the worship services on Sunday, or who live in a relationship which is obviously not biblically sanctioned. I think as a parent one might also look at different actions depending on the situation. Are we faced with out-right disobedience and rebellion against the Lord? Or are we faced with a matter of indifference so that there is still the possibility of perhaps leading that person back to the service of the Lord? I think all of these questions play quite a role. Some parents may say I am going to continue to welcome my son and daughter in my house as long as I possibly can in order that I may have some positive influence on them to bring them back. Other parents say in good conscience, I cannot do that because they have so totally broken with the ordinances of the Lord that they are not really to me anymore a son or a daughter in the biblical sense of the word.

In fact I do not have a general answer to all these kind of questions. There are no easy general answers which fit every situation. You have to look at your son or daughter, and consider the relationship they have and then ask yourselves the question what does the Lord want of *us* in this situation. Not what do I like or what applies to my comfort zone but what is the *Lord* asking. And then sometimes you may have to show not just easy love but tough love as well.

Agema: Many parents struggle with this question. It is a question to which we cannot give one answer. There are parents who continue to allow these children in their homes, there are also those who do not. I can respect both reactions. The one who says "No" and does not allow the disobedient child in the house gives a clear signal to this child as well as to the other children. I can also respect the parents who say "Yes" for in that way they can still address this disobedient child. With both reactions it must be very clear to the child involved that we as parents in no way condone their actions whether they have left the church or live common-law. Your reaction as a parent, whether you still receive them at home or not, may not be interpreted as "well, it seems to be all-right to do this." Your disapproval of the action or life-style of the child in question must be clear.

2. Does God permit us to deliberately delay the conception of our first child under normal circumstances?

Visscher: We dealt with that question last week at some length. Especially Dr. Scholtens responded. The answer then was, under normal circumstances, "no"! There can of course be abnormal, very special circumstances. But if young couples desire to get married but have no desire to have children as a result of their marriage then they should seriously consider postponing

that step. Children are a 'natural' crown upon a marriage and having them should not be delayed unnecessarily.

3. *Last week we discussed "mixed courtship". What do you call a "mixed courtship"?*

1. *If two believers - not from the same church - go together or if two go together and one is a believer and the other is not?*

2. *What should we as parents do if our son or daughter goes steady with someone from the Christian Reformed Church? Is that also a "mixed courtship". These are parent's concerns and of course there are different ideas about this. Please, help us!*

Visscher: I think it is true to say that some of these questions may require a written response in one of our magazines. Last week we came to the conclusion that the term "mixed courtship" in the Bible is mostly applied to a believer and an unbeliever. You remember perhaps that portion of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, which deals with that quite explicitly. Now it is probably true to say that in our circles the term "mixed courtship" often has a wider and more general usage than strictly speaking what the Bible gives us. But if you are asking what is "mixed courtship" in Scripture, than the answer is, courtship between a believer and an unbeliever.

What happens when someone enters the picture from another church and also claims to be a believer? Then the parents have a responsibility to speak with both their son or their daughter as well as with the person with whom they have come into contact or with whom they have begun or are progressing in a relationship. I think it is very important that parents do that as soon as possible and express their concern to their son and daughter as well as point out areas of conflict and disagreement that need to be dealt with. Often, I think parents, will simply say, "no"! But

that is not sufficient. More is necessary also as to educating our children to understand why it is necessary to make a choice for a life's partner with one who has been raised with and understands Scripture as well as the teachings of Scripture in the same way as you do.

Here again, it is not always so clear-cut. The question for instance mentions "a member of the Christian Reformed Church". According to me it makes a difference what *kind* of member? Is it a committed member of that congregation? Is it a member who is biblically and confessionally sound and functioning as such in that Christian Reformed environment. Those kind of questions have to be addressed, and as soon as possible. Someone can take, understandably, a different approach when it concerns a member of another church who is blissfully ignorant - so to speak - and really lets everything go by, doesn't know what is happening and is not really interested either. But when it is someone who is sincerely concerned and is trying to follow the Scriptures and the church orderly way to resolve those kind of problems, one cannot take the same approach. All those factors have to be taken into account as well.

Agema: I would like to point out that speaking about a "mixed courtship", or, a courtship with someone who is not a member of one of the Canadian Reformed Churches is not something that suddenly needs to be addressed at the time your children are dating. It is part of the upbringing of the children when they are young. They have to be taught that this is part of being a living member of the church. As they grow up parents should clearly point out that it is wrong to consider "going steady with someone from another church" but that they should look for a partner within the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this respect I react somewhat differently from Dr. Visscher. I approach it from what we read in I Corinthians 7 : 39, that we are called to marry "in the Lord". That means, among other things, that we

marry as members of one church. The courtship has to be seen in the light of this word as well. So, whether someone is a committed member of a Christian Reformed Church or not is, according to me, not the point. The Lord demands that we are one in Him, united in the faith as fiancées and as husband and wife. We are to be one in the church.

4. Could you please comment on the dilemma elders are faced with of not having enough time for either of the two important jobs, parenting and being an elder. In the pressures of society, family relations are under strain because this often results in "No time left for the family!". However, church-life also places many strains particularly time-strains on fathers who are to attend consistory and board meetings, committees etc. We are over "committee-ized" in our church- and school life. Are there any guidelines you can suggest to counteract this problem?

Visscher: I can certainly identify with that question and with the problems elders, deacons and committee members face. I think there are a couple of things that should be kept in mind.

First of all - and maybe consistories are in this respect the worst offenders - if a brother is already serving, let us say in a school-board, and then a consistory simply turns a blind eye to that fact and nominates him, then if he is elected, he has to decide whether he can do both, or whether he has to make a choice for the one or the other. Maybe there should be more sensitivity on the part of consistories that if a man is serving as a member of the school board or is very busy in some area of Kingdom or Church work, he should not be forced to make this difficult choice. Unless the consistory itself is really convinced that it has no other options. That is one thing.

Another thing is that we have to look more carefully at our schedules in terms of what are we doing with our days and our weeks. Is there not some way in which to make some real family-

time available. We make all kinds of time available for our work because we feel we have to. Is it not true to say that we should make even more time available for our families because we have to!

Another aspect perhaps is that consistories have to look at the question whether they perhaps place a too heavy workload on the elders. Are there too many addresses and families and single members in their ward? How efficiently and how professionally do we work as office-bearers? How well do we use our time? All these aspects come into play.

Sometimes older brothers are purposely bypassed and younger members are chosen when actually the older one has much more time on his hands to do this kind of work. So, I think there are any number of practical solutions that could be looked at.

Agema: I can also certainly relate to this question. It is often difficult to find time for your family. But I like to suggest that here also lies a task for the mother, in this sense, that she makes sure that her husband does stay home at times. I know that there are obligations in the work of a minister and of an elder. Someone calls, you have to go out, and before you know it your agenda is full. You may know that I for one have told my wife to make sure that there is one day which is a day for the family; and she makes sure that I keep that. Also here the task of the mother comes in to serve the well-being of the family.

5. *Could you please comment on the difficulties parents place on their children when they sexually abuse them and*

1. *Make honouring their parents impossible and,*

2. *What are the spiritual ramifications.*

Both Rev. Visscher's address and Rev. Agema's response seem to be directed to a reasonable, typical, harmonious, Christian couple and family. But what about the crippled

family within the church? By that I mean a marriage and family in which one's spouse perhaps is abusive or substance abuser or has a very negative effect on the family structure. Where does the responsibility of the other spouse lie - to the marriage or the children's upbringing?

Visser: This question gets us into the whole area of abuse which I touched on and which is a very prevalent problem today in the world but unfortunately we are also presented with that whole matter in the church. Here again I would hesitate to generalize about "the difficulties the parents place on their children when they sexually abuse them". The ramifications of abuse are deep and they are manifold. It is very hard to summarize all those kind of things in a few seconds. But it is of course true to say that abused individuals - let us for the moment think of children - have a very distorted view of themselves and they also tend to have a very distorted view of their parents, not just the father who may be the perpetrator but also the mother, who may be viewed as some sort of an accomplice. All this, of course, makes the whole question of obedience, love and respect a very difficult thing. Maybe it is sometimes even more difficult later on in life when the full burden of that kind of abuse becomes apparent to these children. Sometimes early on in life the effects are more mixed but later on they become much more evident and much more extreme as well.

Here also comes in the question of a crippled or as it is sometimes called a dysfunctional family in which abuse is taking place, where does the responsibility of the other spouse lie - to the marriage or the children's upbringing?

I am not sure whether that is a question of either or. I think you have a responsibility to your marriage as well as to your children. If a husband is sexually abusing or physically or even psychologically abusing family members, obviously this is a matter where help is necessary, help from the officebearers but

also help from professional sources. One hopes that it will not have to be a choice between either the marriage or the children. Hopefully help can be found and given in such a way that the marriage may turn itself around and at the same time the children can also experience a new type of family relationship.

6. What if a father is abusive? Is this not provoking your children? (Eph. 6:4) How can such a father raise his children in the way of the Lord and how can a child honour such a parent?

Visser: What does it mean when this question refers to a father who is "abusive". Is it a reference to physical abuse or some other kind? I think that the very nature of the word abuse is going beyond what is reasonable. Discipline is one thing, abuse is another thing. Discipline is applying correction in a responsible way. Abuse is a situation in which responsibility is thrown out of the window, one vents one's emotions, desires, or frustration. When a father is abusing his children it will exasperate and provoke his children to anger and we see that all too often today.

Agema: I am aware that also my speech mainly dealt with a "functional family". I am also aware of many problem-families, where family ties are abused and family life does not function at all. The matter of abuse was raised in these questions. Also as officebearers in the churches we begin to learn more and more about it, also, how to deal with it. It is a reality we are confronted with. There are matters in the lives of our congregational members that should not remain hidden and we are not necessarily finished with it when the perpetrator has said, "I am sorry!". The victim also has to be able to accept that forgiveness by the perpetrator.

I would also like to address that matter of a possible clash between our marriage and the upbringing of our children. When children are abused, what comes first our marriage or the chil-

children? In Ephesians 6 the relationship between parents and children is a relationship "in the Lord". That also means that the authority of parents over their children is not absolute. There are boundaries and limits to the authority of a parent. This is the same boundary as there also is to the authority of the government with respect to the citizens of a country. We are to be more obedient to God than to men (Acts 5:39). That also applies to the relationship between parents and children. When parents transgress the boundaries of God's law and demand from or do with their children things that are contrary to God's law then also children should in such situations be more obedient to God than to men. That is also true for the mother in such a home. When the father makes a christian life impossible or makes it impossible for mother to live up to the vows she has given to God when her child was baptized, such a mother has the freedom to move out.

7. How do you feel about the necessity for mothers to work away from the home in order to afford christian education? This would seem to take away time needed at home or loosen ties between family members.

What is the place of post-secondary education for women or professions such as law, medicine etc.? Should such a career be pursued if the woman has a talent in that area? Or should the woman be content to spend twenty or thirty years as a homemaker and mother? Can a healthy balance be achieved between raising a family and any kind of work?

Visser: I am not necessarily advocating that a married woman always has to stay at home for the rest of her life and that she cannot pursue outside interests or that she cannot take up a career which she had before she was married. A lot of that depends on the state of the family and the age of the children. It is very important for children when they are in their young and formative years that mother is there for them so that they don't

come home to an empty house and have no opportunity to express their enthusiasm or to relate their experiences they had in school etc. I definitely think that as long as the children are going to school mother's first priority should be the family. Once the children are past that stage then it certainly is a possibility, if a woman so desires and if her husband agrees and is supportive, to look into other areas. But it is a matter of what are the priorities. A married woman is called to be a wife and to be a mother and that should come first.

The same thing applies to christian education. Christian education should not come at the cost of our families. I mean, if it is really a case of family or christian education then obviously the family comes first. Hopefully that choice does not have to be made and should not have to be made, not in a christian community where people should be willing to help each other and to carry the burden together. But my experience is that sometimes education is no longer seen as a covenantal *community* responsibility but more as a *parental* responsibility. What happens is that you pay, and your child goes to school and basically you stop paying or contributing meaningfully when your child leaves school. I guess that sometimes those are the years we can best afford it and nothing is done! If really there is a situation in which parents are forced to make that kind of a choice it is a sad reflection on the nature of the community in which we are living and I must say that I have not yet experienced that this choice has to be made. But I certainly feel for parents, especially here in Ontario where the school fees are very high and some mothers do feel that they have to take up part-time work and bring money into the home so that education remains affordable. If it has the support of the husband and the children and if it is possible for her to be home with the children once they are home from school, it can be considered. But it also requires the support and the involvement of all the family-members. It is not right for a mother that she has to take a part-time job and then she comes

home from that job and she still has to do all of her regular work, and the rest of the family sits down and watches T.V. or goes out to play and mother can simply fend for herself. No! If that's the kind of thing that is necessary, then I think *all* the members of the family should make a contribution.

8. In more than one family with adopted children parents and children have special difficulties as also parents and natural children do. Does the fact that there is no biological tie between adopted children and their parents explain many of the problems and misunderstandings? Sometimes these parents feel almost guilty that they have adopted children for it often turns out so bad. Please, give some guidance!

Agema: I agree with the one who asked this question that indeed because of that adoption there are special feelings of guilt involved. That is also reflected in the question often raised when serious difficulties arise: should we perhaps not have done it; did we make a mistake when we adopted a child?

However, the same answer applies as applies to parents with natural children. For although a child may be adopted, it is fully your child and also before the Lord it is fully one of His children. The comfort which you may give to parents who have serious difficulties with their children is that the validity of their parenthood does not depend on the way your child acts or behaves. That also applies to adopted children and their parents. It was through the providence of God that also this adopted child came into your family. If then later on your child turns away from the Lord and leaves His Church, yes that can perhaps grieve you your whole life long. You worry about him or her and you are concerned about such a child and you continue to pray for them, but if you as parent did fulfill your task to the best of your ability, prayerfully, living of the grace of God, do then not reflect back and say, "Well, because this happens, that's why originally

it was wrong!". Then you turn things around unnecessarily and consequently you blame yourself too much.

Don't forget, first comes the task, the calling which we have, and then comes the question how do I *fulfill* that calling. Do not make your state of parenthood dependent on the success you may have with your children.

Visscher: My first comment on this question is that we should realize that in God's eyes we are *all* adopted children. God has only one natural Son and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. This is also something that has to be explained to adopted children. That in the eyes of God we are *all* adopted through grace. Therefore it is never a matter of being inferior.

At the same time it should also be said that unfortunately - and experience does teach us that - some of the adopted children turn out to have been in a very early stage of their life also very abused children as well. Later on this becomes apparent and can sometimes be reflected in very rebellious, strange types of behaviour. Also some of these factors have to be taken into account as the child is being raised. Here is maybe also a responsibility for the social worker to divulge more information about the background of this particular child and from what kind of family or home this child comes.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. It has been said that a Christian family is to be like an oasis of refreshment and joy in the desert of this world where God's work of recreation and renewal progresses and where children are prepared to function as independent Christians.

What are some general or structural ways in which your family could become more focused on Christ and God's work of renewal? Think, for example, of how often and how the family spends time together. Does it serve the growing in Christ of all members of the family?

2. a. Is a "generation gap" inevitable? Is the promise of Malachi 4:5,6 still valid for today? If so, how?

Read also Luke 1:17.

b. What does Deuteronomy 6: 4-25 teach us about communicating between the generations today?

3. "The fifth commandment applies first to parents and then to children." Discuss this statement and take into consideration passages like Ephesians 6 : 1-4.

4. What is the difference between firm discipline and child abuse? Compare and discuss in this context, for instance, Proverbs 13:24; 23:3-14 with Proverbs 22:8, Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21.

5. How does your family worship function at the moment? Think of ways to improve it and to encourage maximum participation by the entire family.

6. How important is it to include singing Psalms and Hymns in family worship and why? (Think in this context, for example, of Colossians 3:16-17).
7. Why is individual prayer in privacy also important for the Christian family?
8. How important are part-time jobs for the well-being of the family? Are they, for example, worth sacrificing family togetherness and worship at the supper hour (or some other predetermined time) for?
9. Why is edifying discussion on the sermons in the family circle of great importance?
10. Are your family's entertainment patterns and TV watching consistent with Philippians 4 : 8-9?