

“The Purpose of Marriage”
(Genesis 1:28)

God established the covenant of marriage from the very beginning of His creation. He did this because He didn't want the man to be alone in the work He had given Him to do. He wanted Him to have a companion to be with him, and a helper to support him. He also did this because He wanted to have a living picture or type from the very beginning of that relationship which He had with His people, and which His people would one day have with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Marriage was meant to be a blessing to the man and the woman and a picture of their present and future blessedness, if they would only remain faithful to the Lord. But there was still more.

Adam and Eve were made male and female and put together in this relationship for another reason as well. It was the same reason that God had made all of His other creatures male and female. It was that they might be able to multiply and fill the earth. It was that they might have children. Obviously, if Adam and Eve hadn't had any children, then the human race would have died off. This world would not be filled with people, but only with different kinds of animals. If Adam and Eve hadn't had any children, then Jesus Himself would not have been born, for He was the seed promised to the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. But so that these things wouldn't happen, God blessed them by giving them the ability to conceive and bear children.

Children are a blessing, a wonderful present from the Lord. David writes, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). Paul wrote that no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. But that is what children are, the flesh and blood of those who have them, made in the image of their parents, so that their parents might love them all the more.

This is one of the main reasons why God instituted marriage. ***It is not only for companionship and for mutual help and encouragement, it is also for the purpose of reproduction, that is, if the Lord blesses us with that ability. This is something that a man and woman should consider as they think about entering into a marriage covenant: The bearing and rearing of children.*** This is what I would like for us to consider this evening.

Why is it that people today aren't having more children than they used to have? Isn't it because they don't see them as the blessing they are? Most people used to have large families, because more children meant more workers, and if you had a farm or some kind of trade, children could be a great benefit. They could help with the work. Many hands make the load lighter. They would increase the family's chances of survival, their ability to meet their needs. But today, in our industrialized age, with so many business oriented jobs, machinery to help with the work, and with personal pleasure being our primary goal as a society, children are no longer seen to be a blessing or a need, but rather a hindrance. Now the more children a husband and wife have, the more money it will cost them, the more time it will cost them, the more work they will have to do, and the less time they will have to do the things they would really like to do. I think when we couple this attitude with the almost total breakdown in discipline, which can make children almost unbearable to be around, it should come as no surprise to us that families

today tend to be small.

But it doesn't have to be this way. It shouldn't be this way. Children are a blessing, if we will only get our thinking out of the world's mold and see them as such, and if we will, at the same time, take our responsibility seriously to mold them and shape them into what they should be. Children are a blessing, even if we don't own a farm, or have a vocation that requires more hands to work. It is a wonderful privilege to be entrusted with these small lives to love, protect and provide for. This is God's purpose for marriage and the reason He gave us the ability to procreate. But at the same time, we need to realize that this blessing of God also carries with it the responsibility to raise the children He gives us to His glory. He doesn't want us simply to crank out children without training and disciplining them, for then we might very well be raising our children only for destruction. He wants us to guide, counsel, shape and mold them according to His will. He wants us to pass on to them the treasure with which we have been entrusted. Consider what the Lord tells us in the following passages. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Moses writes in Deuteronomy 6:1-2, "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged." He writes in Deuteronomy 4:9-10, "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. *Remember* the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'" And consider what the Lord says regarding the reason why He chose Abraham in Genesis 18:19, "For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

Now obviously to do this requires a great commitment, a life-long commitment to train and instruct them. We tend sometimes to think that bringing our children to Sunday School and church once a week is enough. But that just isn't true. The kind of training that the Lord calls us to do is rigorous. It includes all of life and should engage us throughout the day. Not only are His commandments to constantly be on our hearts to guard us and guide us into all the paths of righteousness, but we are also to be impressing them on the hearts of our little ones throughout all the days they spend in our homes. What better way could there be to give your children the best start they could possibly have in life than this? The early years of their lives are so important. They are the years that their life and world views are being formed. Consider your own upbringing. Isn't it true that the things that come most automatically to us now are the things we were most familiar with when we were growing up? Look at your own household and the way you run it. Don't you find that you constantly refer back to the way your parents raised you, either for better or for worse? That was your model, and it will affect you for the rest of your life. If it was a bad one, you might be able to change some of those things in the rearing of your own children, but you won't be able to change them all. How seriously then should we strive to give our children the very best model that we can? The instruction of our children in the home is far more important than we often realize.

Something we don't often think about is the fact that early on in the history of the church, the true faith was kept alive in households. Virtually all of the evangelism that went on was through the covenantal nurture of children. Where was the church during the time of Adam? It was in his house. Now it's not that all of his children were believers, because they weren't. Abel believed, but Cain definitely didn't. Abel was killed, but in spite of this seeming drawback, the true faith was still kept alive in through Adam's son Seth, and from Seth it was passed onto Enosh, and from Enosh to Kenan, from Kenan to Mahalalel, from Mahalalel to Jared, from Jared to Enoch, from Enoch to Methuselah, then to Lamech, and then to Noah (Gen. 5). It was preserved within these households. And from Noah, it went through Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and then Abram (Gen. 11). And from Abraham, it went through Isaac, Jacob and then to the twelve patriarchs. All during this time, it was kept alive solely in the home. It wasn't until the time of the patriarchs' sojourn into Egypt and the later Exodus of the people out of that land that the number of households multiplied to the point where worship became public. But even after it became public, the true religion would never have survived if it had not been kept up in the home. The same is true today. If we are not diligent to keep it up in our own homes, if we do not have family worship at least on a daily basis, if we do not meet with the Lord privately in our closets, if we are not constantly instructing and guiding our children into the truth, we can't expect it to survive either. We must worship the Lord daily, not just weekly, as a family, not just as a church, and this worship must extend to all of life, or we can really expect to see very little or no growth in our Christian walk and in the kingdom of God. Worship, in the sense of whole-hearted and universal obedience of life to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2), is the source of our spiritual life and that which will have the greatest effect in bringing our children to Christ. God tells us that He gave us marriage because He was seeking a godly offspring (Mal. 2:15). But how will our offspring be godly unless we use the God appointed means to make them so? How will our children ever learn the ways of the Lord, unless we teach them?

And so we need to take the rearing of our children seriously. In closing, I would like to consider briefly how to do this.

First, as I have already said, our instruction needs to be continual and universal. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and 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 up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." God's Law first needs to be imprinted in our hearts and become a part of our lives, and then we are to seek to do what we can to imprint them on the hearts of our children. Now the Lord already imprinted them on your heart when He saved you. This was one of the blessings of the New Covenant. Quoting Jeremiah 31, the author to the Hebrews writes, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My Laws into their minds, and will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Heb. 8:10). What this means is that God has already given us a love for His Law. We should already be striving to live according to it, to one degree or another. The Lord simply wants us to teach our children to do the same. Now, it's true that we cannot write them on their hearts as God can. We cannot make them love His Law. But God doesn't expect us to. He does expect us not to hinder them in any

way from loving it, but He doesn't expect us to give them a love for it, for only He can. Rather He expects us to be faithful in teaching them that Law day in and day out. He wants us to guide them throughout the day. He wants us to explain to them why we do the things we do, and why we stay away from the things we don't do. He wants us to teach them the difference between right and wrong, and to show them from His Word why certain things are good and others are not. He wants us to read His Word to them, and to read it ourselves, so that they can see that we take it seriously. He wants us also to teach them to read it and to understand it, because it doesn't do them any good if they aren't able to comprehend what they are reading. But again, don't forget the emphasis on constancy. We are to do this when we rise up and lie down, when we are sitting or walking. He wants us to saturate them with His Word.

But there is something else that we need to bear in mind as we do this. We need to remember that we are not necessarily instructing little saints, but most often little sinners. They aren't always going to receive and automatically do everything we tell them to do. This means that there will be times when we need to correct them. This doesn't necessarily imply spanking, but often it does. If we can correct them with our words and get them moving again in the right path, then that is all that is needed. But very often more is needed. If they will not learn to listen and obey the first time, not after repeated warnings, then we most likely need to spank them. Spanking is commended to us in the Word again and again. It is not evil, but good, for it has the ability to make our children listen, like nothing else can. Solomon writes, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him" (Prov. 22:15), and "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother" (29:15). Very often, if the child needs to be disciplined for selfishness because he or she got into a fight with a brother or sister over a toy or something else, taking that thing away from them for a time can teach them the importance of not coveting. Whatever the method is, it needs to accomplish the goal of correcting the behavior of the child without compromising God's Word or your authority over them as their parents. You certainly should avoid bribing or manipulating your children to make them do what you want. Making them think that they are doing what they want to when they are really doing what you want them to do is not teaching them obedience. They are obedient when they do what you want them to do whether they want to do it or not. Also, don't forget that children can disobey through their attitudes as well as their actions. If they do what you want with a stubborn or prideful attitude, they are still falling far short of the goal. God wouldn't accept this kind of obedience from us. We shouldn't allow it in our children either. We should also not forget the power of encouragement. Discipline doesn't always need to be negative. Sometimes a little encouragement can go a long way in helping our children choose the path of obedience.

In closing, consider the opening words of Psalm 78, a wisdom psalm which was meant to teach God's people His wisdom that they might experience His blessing. The psalmist writes, "Listen, O my people, to my instruction; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, *even* the children *yet* to be born, *that* they may arise and tell *them* to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation

that did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Psalm 78:1-8). If we fail to pass this treasure onto our children, even though they are covenant children, they may very well end up a stubborn and rebellious generation like the Jews. But if we are faithful to pass it on, with the Lord’s blessing, they will put their confidence in God and keep His commandments. Which do you want for your children? Certainly, you want His blessing for them. May the Lord then help us to be faithful to Him in the rearing of our children, and may He be pleased to grant to each of them His blessing of life. Amen.