

The Cursed Family – Sermon 1 – General Nature of Families

Thomas Risley (1630-1716)

Gen. 2:18

I. The Text Opened

A. Genesis 2:18

1. “...it is not good that man should be alone. I will make a help meet for him,” (Gen. 2:18).
 - a) The general nature of families, and of Christian families relatively considered as members of the church is to be considered first.
2. Among the very beasts of the field, fowls of the air, and fish of the sea, the great searchers into philosophy have discovered some obscure resemblances of government, greater and lesser societies, kingdoms, cities, and families.
 - a) By God’s ordination, they keep their places, observe their times, do their work, build, furnish, make dens, caves, burrows, nests, set up house, break up house, raise their young, help, and send them abroad for common good.
 - b) These patterns are only imperfectly drawn in these creatures, yet they point at excellent education, laws, and virtues, and teach sobriety, fidelity, chastity, amity, gratitude, vigilance, diligence, and unwearied care of themselves and those belonging to their charge.
3. After the Almighty had finished his work, created Adam and placed him in paradise, he was pleased to say, “it is not good that man should be alone. I will make a help meet for him,” (Gen. 2:18).
 - a) The word *family*, strictly taken, is that order of mankind which is united in marriage, signifying the terms of husband and wife, parents, children, master, and servant.
 - (1) Yet here it includes households made of kind friends living together for their mutual benefit, as men and Christians.
 - (2) It also includes the superior societies of academic discipline and the inferior collection of country schools.
 - (3) Both are useful for those who uphold the law and the ministry, so they ought to be of special influence to maintain religion and Christian government in church and state.
4. That famous orator, whose name is turned into a surname of eloquence (as Quintilian has it), when speaking of the union of families, wrote that there is a more noble principle of human societies than sense, in other words, the attractive power of reason, which by counsels, precepts, decisions, and judgments, cements and strengthens societies.
 - a) But God’s word on this subject strikes a higher note, no less a union for marriage only in the Lord.
 - (1) If this union were observed, how much happier would families, relations, parishes, magistrates, ministers, kingdoms, and churches be?

II. The Doctrine from the Text

- A. Doctrine: Families were not constituted for natural and secular ends, but for political and ecclesiastical ends, the good of country and the church of God.

1. It is a most dangerous design to think of multiplying wickedness by gathering into societies, as if the lesser sins of single life, when married into society, might take liberty to swell into a flood.

a) We may believe that families and societies were not constituted for natural and secular ends, but for political and ecclesiastical ends, the good of country and the church of God.

b) Therefore, to one admiring a fair house, he observes the glorious outside of the building without looking within to see how well children are governed and educated, marriage honored, the family and all belonging to it prudently managed.

c) He that has such a home that is well managed within lives in a palace to be sure.

d) From what has been said, it is evident how much good or hurt may proceed from families.

(1) For although the family unit does not contend with greater societies for precedence of honor, yet towns, cities, and great states are made up of families.

(2) Therefore, as it is in natural bodies, if the first mixture is imperfect, it is hardly corrected in the latter.

(3) So, in civil bodies, if families and villages (because of a lack of good government) abound in wicked behaviors, the malignancy presently infects kingdoms and churches to which they belong.

(4) It may be that initially the private households send all manner of evil into the world such that swearing, debauchery, immorality, contempt of religion and of sobriety become popular and in fashion.

(a) If parents do not prevent sins in their children at home, when they go into the world, they meet with temptations which turn their youthful flings into immoveable habits.

(b) It is easy to observe, that the lack of family religion is the cause of the visible decay of the welfare of church and state.

2. The word church is vulgarly taken to mean the building where people assemble to worship God, sometimes for the judicial power of church officers and sometimes for church revenues.

a) But here it is taken to mean the visible church of Christ, militant upon the earth, encompassing believers of all places and times from first to last, made up of individual churches or societies of believers; and these made up of believing families.

b) A Christian family should be the personification of the church, but it is far otherwise.

(1) A minister may go visit various families in the parish and find not a word of Scripture read, nor a prayer made in the family all week long, as if religion were an enemy to their house, or a duty performed only on the sabbath day.

c) At first, the church of God was local, not national.

(1) But then the holy line grew strong and populous from good families like Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem (who lived until Isaac was 50 years old), Abraham the father of the faithful, etc. But as time went by, later generations in Cain, Ham, Ishmael, and Esau degenerated spiritually, and so the church in turn also degenerated.

(2) It is in this way in our days.

(a) Ungodly families are the decay of God's church.

(b) They make thin congregations; they bring waste upon the solemn assemblies.

(3) What an odious thing is it to loiter away the Lord's Day?

- (4) How absurd to indulge the flesh upon the Lord's Day, and give the flesh no rest upon the weekday?
- (5) What wickedness is it to go forth all the week to serve the world, and refuse to go forth on the Lord's Day to serve him?
- (6) Who would think that profaning the sabbath was so shameless in families who call themselves Christian?
- (7) Why should a poor excuse hinder men and women from the church but not from the market?
- (8) How many excuses do some make, when instead they should be going to church to sanctify the Lord's Day in their conscionable attendance on God's ordinances?
- (9) What an unseemly thing is it to skulk at home, or sit at a neighbor's house talking, eating, sleeping, leisurely spending hour after hour for carnal pleasure, or to visit away or travel away the Lord's Day, when they should be waiting at the gates of wisdom.
- (a) These profane families break the commitment they made at the point of salvation and baptism, when they were solemnly admitted into the church of God, engaging to renounce the works of the devil, the world, and the flesh and to continue in the communion of the saints to love, fear, and worship God who made them for that end and into whose name they were baptized.
- (b) Are not these the most notorious enemies to Christianity, whose life is a flat contradiction to their baptism?
- (c) Are they not enemies to the church, as well as to themselves, who willfully excommunicate themselves from God's ordinances?
- (d) All ungodly families invite the guilt of the sin of separation by their sabbath-breaking.
- (e) For if they are true members of the church of Christ, why do they not uphold their Christian profession in public?
- (f) Why do they not keep their baptismal covenant, to holy and constant fellowship with Christ and his church in their families?
- (g) Why do they not prioritize Christianity in their houses, that they might share in the heavenly promises and blessings of the spirit of Christ, by prayers and praises, reading and learning Scripture?
- (i) *Because of the mystical union and holy communion between Christ and all true Christians, they are obligated to uphold their commitment to the covenant.*
- (ii) *For he is not a good church member who is not a good Christian at home.*
- (h) "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God," (Rom. 2:28-29).

3. What profit will there be at the day of judgment for those professing Christians who live like infidels and heathens?
- a) Shall God's grace abound to us in this age of his church by breaking down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and then we set up a partition between God's house and our own and not permit religion to dwell there?
- b) The congregation of the faithful is made up of believing families who believe that a right belief and participation in the church assembly will bring forth the fruits of holiness in their family.

c) All parents and heads of families under the covenant of grace should be more attentive to the spiritual concerns of all those under their care than those who are merely parents under the law, because of clearer discoveries and more plentiful experiences of grace.

(1) "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, also upon the servants and the handmaids, I will pour out my spirit," (Joel 2:28-29).

4. To rule your own household as a Christian presupposes that:

a) (1.) You do that which nature dictates naturally, namely, to feed, clothe, shelter, and defend those under your charge, (2 Cor. 8:21).

b) (2.) You do that which, in a moral sense, reason commands, and that is to govern in a deliberate way by teaching your children to read, to be just, dutiful, modest, diligent and patient.

(1) Further, in regard to your servants, you are to pay them wages fairly and in proportion to their particular work. For nature teaches rewards in general, but reason requires a fair distribution of rewards.

c) (3.) You govern your family in a Christian manner that is most excellent, as reason is above sense, and faith is above both.

(1) Christian family discipline must instruct, correct, and govern like itself, namely, to attain, promote, and persevere in all Christian duties toward God and man, wholly devoting yourself to Christ to be his faithful servant forever.

(2) This behavior and intent will prevent two great enemies to all order – anarchy and tyranny.

(3) O! that we would realize that God will reckon with all governors of families, both for not using and for abusing their talents of authority.

(4) These blind heads of families, willfully refusing to properly assume their duty both in single and married life, and those who desire no knowledge of their duty at all, must be held responsible for taking no care for the souls of their children.

(5) O! that parents would consider whether there is anything else in this world that deserves their care and diligence more than their own salvation and their constant prayers to God for the salvation of their children's souls.

(6) O! parents, are you a blessing or a curse to your family?

(a) Would you have your children prosper in this world to forever perish in the next?

(b) Would you take care of them here upon earth, and not be afraid that they miss heaven through your carelessness?

(c) May the Lord of mercy awaken you to establish Christianity in your houses, that you may instruct, correct, and rule yourselves first, and then your families as Christians, lest God's curse that he denounces against wicked men's houses pursue you and rest upon you forever hereafter.

5. To curse (according to the general sense of the Hebrew and Greek) means to abandon, renounce, abdicate, and abhor as a detestable thing; to excommunicate and cast out a vile and profane person from God's church and from his ordinances.

a) Cursing not only signifies an absence of God's blessing, but an infusion of judgment on wicked people and families, according to what they deserve for their sins, both in this life and in the life to come.

b) To "bless" is with God to make blessed, and to "curse" is to make cursed.

(1) Saying and doing is all one and the same with God.

(2) So, to speak a curse is to inflict it; to speak a blessing is to confer it.

(3) *And as it is God's peculiar privilege to bless; so it is his to curse. "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?" (Num. 23:8).*

c) No heathen gods, evil spirits, nor the devil himself can send curses upon anyone without permission from the Almighty.

(1) *For wicked houses to be under the curse of God is to be without his gracious keeping and fatherly care.*

(2) *It is to be subjected day and night to his wrath and vengeance for their sins.*

(3) *It includes being excommunicated, banished, and rejected from God's love and saving grace here on earth, and hereafter to be shut out of heaven. Among the Jews we read of cutting off souls from the congregation (Lev. 17-20). This cutting off denotes an excommunicating not only from the privileges of the saints here, but also from their company in heaven.*

d) When Cain was banished from God's presence, he was not only exiled by God but cursed by him as well, as one deprived of his gracious protection and mercy forever.

(1) *This is called by the apostle "anathema," or an excommunication to death or until the Lord himself comes to judge, (1 Cor. 16:22).*

e) O sinking families! O! houses separated to final destruction!

(1) *Will you not realize in your hearts, will you not awake to consider, that the fire of God's wrath has entered your houses?*

(2) *Will you not tremble to bring God's curse on you and your children?*

(3) *God is angry with the wicked every day, (Psa. 7:11).*

(4) *"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup," (Psa. 11:6).*

(5) *"Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him," (Isa. 3:11).*

6. Question: Who are these wicked? And what do you mean by wicked houses?

a) Answer: Wicked houses are plainly described in Scripture, so let none be deceived, or take this to be unkind and so become offended with what follows.

b) (1.) Dark, blind, and ignorant houses are wicked houses (Psa. 53:4; 2 Cor. 4:3; Eph. 4:18).

c) (2.) Houses full of deceit, injustice, swearing, cursing, lying, sabbath-breaking, filthy speaking, slandering (Jer. 7:8-9; Neh. 13:17-18; Col. 3:8; Psa. 15:3).

d) (3.) Covetous and oppressing houses, with the intent to entangle the estates of unfortunate neighbors by buying and selling them for filthy gain, (Micah 2:1-3).

e) (4.) Malicious, treacherous, and bloody houses, (Rom. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 3:3-4; 2 Sam. 21:1).

f) (5.) Persecuting houses (whether secretly or openly, as both are one in the sight of God) under whatever pretense of religion, law, justice, and obedience to governors, (Acts 6:10-14, 14:5; 1 Thess. 2:15-16; 2 Tim. 4:14-15).

g) (6.) Luxurious houses, whose god is their belly, whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things, (Phil. 3:19).

h) (7.) Corrupt families who entice others to sin, (Hab. 2:15).

i) (8.) Houses of whoredom, (Prov. 7).

j) (9.) Houses of worldly pride and ambition who forsake the God that made them and lightly esteem the rock of their salvation, (Deut. 32:15; Psa. 10:4). They will not seek after God; God is not in all their thoughts.

k) (10.) Prayerless houses, who open and shut their eyes, and their doors, without the first Scripture read or prayer made all the days of the week; whose practice says, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (Job 21:15).

l) (11.) Those who have some form of godliness but deny the power thereof, (2 Tim. 3:5) and hypocrites who profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, (Titus 1:9).