

Part 4 Sins of Wicked Families

by Thomas Risley (1630–1716)

Gen. 2:18

I. The Text Opened

A. Gen. 2:18

1. "...it is not good that man should be alone. I will make a help meet for him."

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine and Application: The pernicious influence of the sins of wicked families have a negative effect on the church and country.

1. There has never been any nation well and peaceably governed where religion and a persuasion of a divine providence was not soundly planted in the minds of men.
 - a) And the more that any individual was privately devoted to religion and the reverencing of a divine spirit, the more illustrious and famous he became in all innocence and integrity of life.
 - b) The secret atheism of men's judgments and the known atheism of their practice opens the door to all wickedness, injustice, pride, perjury, tyranny, sacrilege, or any other evil (Psa. 14:1-2).
 - c) As Titus 1:16 states, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."
 - (1) *It is notable that the book by Nathanael Ranew, The Practice of Piety, was dedicated to King Charles I, (then heir apparent of these kingdoms), intimating that true religion is the best crown imperial, the undoubted glory and safety of church and state.*
 - (a) *Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good, (Eccl. 9:1).*
 - d) The common good of both the church and state depend on religion.
 - (1) *If your heart is truly loyal, then live with an awe of religion.*
 - (2) *Those that are without a devoted service to God also do not typically subject themselves to earthly rulers.*
 - (3) *He that is subject only for fear of wrath and the power of the sword will no longer be so when he has an opportunity of escaping or resisting that power.*
 - (a) *Nor is there any possible way to secure men in their quiet subjection and obedience but by their being obliged for conscience sake.*
 - (4) *Therefore, such kind of persons who by their open profaneness and contempt of religion endeavor to destroy morality from among men may rightly be considered seditious and most destructive to civil government.*
 - (5) *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," (Prov. 14:34).*
 - e) It is the observation of Josephus in his writings that the Jews had grown very profane and careless of religion before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

(1) “Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood touches blood. Therefore, shall the land mourn, and everyone that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away,” (Hosea 4:1-3).

(a) The abominable wickedness of Canaan provoked the Lord to, “visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomited out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it,” (Lev. 18:25-28).

f) Personal sins quickly become popular, and as sin is a plague, it infects others even when we are not aware of it.

(1) Sin is as diffusive as the air we breathe.

(2) There is much danger in a contagious conversation.

(3) One person infects a family, one family a whole street, one street a whole city, one city a whole country, one country a whole world.

(a) If sin begins with one angel it infects legions, if it begins with one woman, it infects all mankind.

(4) You sit at home thinking you do no harm to the kingdom or church.

(5) But the fact is that your family’s sins will abound, and it may be rightly said of sinners that they strive to infect others.

(a) Your sabbath-breaking, idleness, pride, backbiting, drunkenness, covetousness and such like, breed sins at home and then spread to your neighbor’s house.

(b) Afterwards, you, your children, and your corrupted neighbors carry these sins into villages, towns, and cities.

(c) And in the process of time, the whole land where you live becomes defiled.

(d) This fire of family sins, being once kindled, finds more fuel among sinful men, and so going from one to another, it eventually breaks forth into consuming flames.

(e) A whole tribe was corrupted with idolatry which first came from Micah’s family (Judges 17-18).

(f) Achan’s sin brought God’s hand not only upon himself and his family, but all Israel suffered for it, (Joshua 7:13).

(i) And a long time after, Achan is called the “troubler of Israel,” (1 Chron. 2:7).

g) But especially the families of great people – princes, magistrates, nobility, gentry, clergy – bring judgments on whole nations and countries.

(1) Scriptural examples include Saul, Jeroboam, Baasha, Ahaz, and Manasseh.

(2) The sins of nobility and gentry spread more rapidly than the sins of lay persons.

(3) And as to the contagion of the sins of the ministry, the prophets of Jerusalem said, “is profaneness gone forth into all the land?” (Jer. 23:15).

(4) Some domestic and private sins grow quickly into national and political sins, as sabbath-breaking, murder, perjury, rebellion against natural parents and civil authorities, oppression, idolatry, heresy (Deut. 13:19, 21).

h) Such texts show the national epidemic malignancy of those sins.

2. 2. Consider that ungodly families overthrow churches.

a) Profane hands in churches pull down God’s house.

b) Unbelief, lack of repentance, sabbath-breaking, swearing, debauchery, atheism, blasphemy, whoredom, contempt of religion and morality, are the beasts that waste and, “devour the Lord’s vineyard.”

(1) These are the sins which the prince of darkness and his infernal rabble strive to maintain and propagate, to overthrow Christianity, and even humanity itself.

c) The tabernacles of Edom and Ishmaelites, of Moab, and Ammon, and Amalek, the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre (wicked, wicked families) say, “Come, let us cut them off from being a nation (or a church) that the name of Israel (or the name of Christianity) may be no more in remembrance,” (Psa. 83:4).

d) The general, ignorant, and scandalous sins of too many so-called Christians is like the abomination of desolation in the holy place, (Dan. 11:31).

(1) Those sins which rise out of irreligious households make havoc of the church.

(2) And are, in effect, the bloody Haman’s against God’s church.

(3) Family wickedness of princes, priests, and people brought destruction on Jerusalem, demolishing the temple, which was one of the wonders of the world for its building, a type of Christ in the flesh and of his church upon earth.

e) Joshua, at a full assembly of elders, heads, judges and officers, delivered this weighty charge in his speech, namely, “to fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth.” This was to be done not only in cities and towns, but in all families, as the principal means for the prosperity of church and state, (Josh. 24:1, 14-15, 20).

(1) “Go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel,” (Jer. 7:13).

f) It is most certain that the church cannot flourish unless the parts and members of it perform holy duties and offices in their capacities, both in church and at home.

(1) The lack of religion in families is the decay of churches.

g) The similarity between a Christian family and a church is that each whole is made up of its individual parts.

(1) If the parts are wicked and profane, the constitution of the whole is vicious and depraved, more or less, according to the proportion of the parts.

(2) Is it likely that heads of families can be truly devout in the church while exercising no religion at home?

(3) How shall we judge the church’s increase, if not from religion in families?

(a) Wickedness of families makes the glory of Jacob thin, (Isa. 17:4).

(b) Wicked families eat up Jacob, devour, consume, and make his habitation desolate, (Jer. 10:25).

(c) The degree of piety in families directly determines the strength and prosperity of the church and Christ’s kingdom.

h) The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of church and state, depends much on family government and duty.

(1) If there is any hope of the amendment of a wicked, miserable, distracted world, it must be mostly done by family religion and the Christian education of youth.

(2) What country does not groan under the confusions, miseries, and horrid wickedness which are the fruits of family neglects, and the careless and lacking education of youth?

(3) In the preface to the record for dissolution of lesser monasteries, among the reasons returned, included the vicious and evil nature of their houses.

(4) Another said that fornication, adulteries, treachery, sodomy and incest were committed and brooded in those houses.

(5) How soon would the best part of the world decay under the corruption of families?

(a) As in the natural body, so in the mystical – it thrives or wastes according to the good or bad temperament of the parts that comprise it.

i) If families of nominal Christians were real living members of the church, their succeeding posterity would increase it.

(1) But we have cause to lament the weakness of it because of the wickedness of its offspring.

(2) It is most evident from Scripture that those who profess to be Christian are not true members of God's church if they are not living members of Christ.

(3) "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).

(a) He is not a sound Christian who is baptized, except he shows evidence of being inwardly renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

(b) The real Christian is, "a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new," (2 Cor. 5:17).

(c) And the, "new creature has put off his former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and is renewed in the spirit of his mind, and has put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," (Eph. 4:22-24).

j) The lack of Christianity practiced in households is the reason the Lord's Day is not better observed, that so few profit under the word, and that there are so few prepared hearts present at the Lord's Table.

(1) This is why ministers have slender congregations, and why taverns, ale houses, walks, fields, and gardens in the neighborhood are more visited than the places of God's worship.

(2) All you careless, ignorant, worldly, and loose heads of families, do not allow the awareness that your family's wickedness can overthrow the church, to pass out of your thoughts until it pleases God to change you and reform your families.

(3) Are you friends to the church?

(a) Set up the practice of piety in your families, which are the nurseries of the church.

(b) This duty is of great importance to the interest of reformed religion and of the church in this country.

(4) If professing Christians live in their houses, in due conformity to their covenant in baptism, through God's mercy this will render our church beautiful as the garden of the Lord; and our land, as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed.

(5) The Romans were as careful to maintain their vestal fire as to preserve the palladium, as pledges of felicity to the empire; signifying to us Christians that if religion and virtue, piety and policy are defended – and their contraries of profaneness and immorality suppressed and punished – then the Lord will build us up and not pull us down.

(6) He will plant us and not root us up.

(a) If we entertain the life and power of Christianity and honesty in our families, "upon all the glory shall be a defense," (Isa. 4:5).

k) Question: What about errors and heresies that subvert Christianity? And what should we think of apostates, are they not greater enemies to the church than profane families?

(1) Answer. This is not intended to be a comparative inquiry as to whether damnable errors and heresies do more mischief in our church than wicked families.

- (2) *But the main business at hand is to show that profane and wicked families are pernicious enemies to both church and state.*
- (3) *Sabbath-breaking, swearing, drunkenness, filthiness, covetousness, oppression, pride, treachery, perjury, cursing, cheating, killing, stealing, lying, and such like sins in families will, in time, ruin kingdoms and churches.*
- (4) *Profane scandalous people are practical atheists and heretics.*
- (5) *They profess that they know God, but in good works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient and to every good work reprobate (Titus 1:16).*
- (a) *Moral evils of sin and intellect are cooperative.*
- (b) *An upset stomach has an aching head, and corrupt streams come from a corrupt fountain.*
- (c) *Heretics and sensualists, scandalous persons in families and parishes, join forces as fatal and capital enemies to the church.*
- (d) *We have sadly experienced what mischief, sects, and schismatic causes and instruments have brought among Christians.*
- (6) *He is no better than a wicked man that creates divisions and will not allow separations to heal.*
- (a) *Such were the Donatists, whose tumults were suppressed by the magistrate.*
- (b) *O! that all scandalous and profane families in parishes would sit down as if in God's presence, seriously considering that they are no more living members of God's church than the dead bodies in the church yard are living members of their respective family.*
3. 3. Profane families are also great enemies to the ministry.
- a) Heads of families need to perform their duties according to God's command, that is, to establish Christianity in their families by prayer, reading the word of God, teaching the catechism, showing good examples throughout the week as well as on the Lord's Day, causing their families to keep it holy, both publicly and privately.
- b) I say that if their families were thus governed, the word preached by ministers would take better effect upon them.
- c) Is it likely that preachers can do any good when parents by open profaneness continually pull down what they set up?
- d) Can the ministry prosper in a congregation where most families do nothing towards it themselves, by keeping holy the Lord's Day, and serving and worshipping him throughout the week?
- (1) *If those heads of families would work together with the minister, religion would enter into families through God's blessing.*
- e) But what little is done to help forward the salvation of souls by good parents!
- f) They ought to prepare and break up the fallow ground of their families, they ought to root out the weeds of vice, and pluck up corrupt principles out of this little spot of ground, that it may be fit to receive the seed of the word with profit, (Jer. 4:3, Hosea 10:12).
- (1) *Parents ought to make their families nurseries for the church, i.e., well husbanded, well disciplined, and well taught.*
- (2) *In their own houses, parents are both magistrates and ministers in a subordinate way, charged with training up a hopeful generation for church and kingdom.*
- (3) *Why do ignorant, loose, worldly, careless, prayerless families cast off their duty of the Christian education of their children?*

(4) They are bound as believers not only to dedicate them to the Lord by baptism, but as their children's caretakers, to bring them up, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," (Eph. 6:4).

4. The barrenness of the ground upon which the seed of the word is sown is a cause of sorrow as well as discouragement to a faithful minister.

a) Do you not think, O wicked families, that it is not a great sorrow to godly ministers when the seedtime for the bread of souls is hindered by you?

b) Is not Christ himself Lord of this harvest who is also judge of the world?

c) Are not you the tares, and must not they be cast into the fire, not only for being tares, but for hindering the wheat? (Matt. 13:40-41).

d) It was the great grief of that holy man and famous divine, Mr. Richard Greenham (about the 35th year of Queen Elizabeth) that regardless of his preaching, prayers, and tears, he had a barren, obstinate and ignorant church.

(1) Is it not a matter of sorrow that the good minister finds little more show of religion in his congregation than what comes in due course on the Sabbath-day, or that most in the church dismiss religion as soon as they turn their backs on the place of God's worship?

(a) Though they bring their Bibles to church, they never open them throughout the week.

(2) They join in public prayers, but do not pray at home with their families.

(3) They act like Christians in God's house and live like heathens in their own.

(4) Our blessed Savior wept over Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kill the prophets, and stone them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and ye would not," (Matt. 23:37).

(a) When he beheld the city Christ wept over it, saying, "if thou had known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes," (Luke 19:41-42).

(b) After this sort, the prophet is affected, "if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride," (Jer. 13:17).

e) O! you parents, what will you do?

(1) Will you be obstinate and impenitent when your good minister, and even your blessed Lord and Savior, are tender and compassionate?

(2) Will you be careless when your minister is commanded to watch for your souls?

(3) And will you be cruel to the souls of your families, when ministers are sent of God to preach faith and repentance, mercy and forgiveness to you?

(a) Will you harden your hearts in stubbornness when God by his ministers is praying for you to be reconciled to himself?

5. Consider that profane families provoke God to take away the gospel from us and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits thereof, (Matt. 21:43).

a) God has been pleased to plant his vineyard in our country, which since the Reformation has taken root and spread her branches in abundance.

b) And blessed be the Almighty, for the wall of our good laws is not broken down.

c) But where are the fruits?

(1) We hear of common scandalous sins of drunkenness, swearing, and pernicious doctrines; and the sin of sabbath-breaking in towns and villages is notorious in the face of his majesty's royal proclamation for the suppressing and preventing of profaneness, dissolute living, and all immoralities, and for the embracing of virtue and piety in this church and kingdom.

(2) And yet, how few families in cities, towns, or villages observe the Lord's Day?

(3) How few Christians keep holy the Lord's Day?

(a) God would be just, “to deliver his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand,” (Psa. 78:61), referring to the sins of Eli’s sons in the priesthood, (1 Sam. 2), and to their punishment, (1 Sam. 4), not only of the priests but the people also.

(4) And we, both ministers and people, for our sins have cause to fear lest God deprive us of our strength and glory, i.e. his gracious presence.

6. Consider, that this profaneness of families is the greatest reproach on them.

a) As sin leaves behind it the forest wounded on conscience, so it marks the person with the vilest brand.

b) What can expiate that guilt which stains the heavens, curses the earth, casts down angels from their glory, and made man as vile as the beasts that perish?

c) Who can blot out that which is written in heaven in God’s book, on earth in the consciences of men, and unhappily copied out, to be written in the memory of succeeding posterity?

d) Who can purge that away, which defiles the souls of men?

(1) No banishment, nor change of climate, nor even death itself can free the sinner’s evil conscience from the guilt of his sin and wipe away his reproach and everlasting shame.

(2) As Daniel 12:2 states, “And those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

(3) The seed of evil doers shall never be renowned, (Isa. 14:20).

(4) “The just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot,” (Prov. 10:7).

(a) You have invited shame to your house by cutting off many people and have “sinned against thy soul,” (Hab. 2:10).

(b) Are not Ahab’s and Jezebel’s sins in the file of reproach?

(c) There was none like Ahab, who sold himself to work wickedness, whom Jezebel his wife, that cursed woman, stirred up.

(d) Add to this Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel sin, King Ahaz, Simon the sorcerer, Elymas the sorcerer, and Judas the traitor.

(i) *These people to this day have their brand of infamy.*

(5) Man does not lose his honor except by sin, then he replaces his creation-robe with one of guilt and shame.

e) None but Jesus Christ, the anointed of the Lord, can restore us to this ancient estate of honor and communion with God by making us a new creation in Christ, robed in his righteousness and holiness.

(1) Grace is the foundation of pristine glory.

(2) The way to raise yourself and family is by the steps of piety and virtue.

(3) Destroy your wickedness and vice and set up religion in your family.

(4) “Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed,” (1 Sam. 2:30).

(5) It is said that the valiant Roman Marcellus built two temples – one of honor and the other of virtue.

(a) None could enter the temple of honor without first passing through the temple of virtue.

(6) No one should be promoted to civil honor unless they are loyal, temperate, religious, valiant, charitable to the poor, and ready to accompany their sovereign to war.

(7) Can any, therefore, hope that God will honor any such families or persons who trample on his holy laws, blaspheme his name, renounce their allegiance in holy baptism, and give no honor and service to God, who has condescended to take them for his covenant servants?

(8) Can we say properly that such as these are Christians?

(9) Are they not the scandal and shame of Christianity?

(10) Are they not of the synagogue of Satan? (Rev. 2:9).

f) It is very excellently said by a learned divine that all the members of the body have their proper and distinct offices, according as they have their proper and distinct faculties.

(1) No member of the body can call itself by any other name than its proper position and function.

(2) So, if you say you are a member of the body of Christ, what is your office in that body?

(3) If you have no office in that body, then you are nothing more than a tumor or scab; you certainly are not a true member of the body.

(4) And if you are not a true member of the body, how dare you challenge the head by calling yourself a Christian!

(5) Therefore, O! Christian, beware of bearing a name that says you are alive when you are dead.

(6) As a dead man is no man, so the nominal Christian is no Christian.

7. Why will you, O professor of Christianity, live in your family as without God in the world?

a) Why will you heathenize yourself and your posterity?

b) Idolaters condemn you for your course of life, as they did the professing people of the true God under the law.

c) "For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit," (Jer. 2:10-11).

(1) "All people will walk, everyone in the name of his God, and why wilt not thou walk in the name of the Lord thy God?" (Micah 4:5).

d) O! Christian, you are not only condemned by idolaters for the wickedness in your family, you are also condemned by your own self, as Joshua said to Israel, "You are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen the Lord to serve him," and they said, "we are witnesses," (Josh. 24:22).

(1) You have chosen to serve the Lord and to put away the idols of the flesh and the world by your covenant in baptism.

(2) Therefore, take up Joshua's resolution and say, "as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord," (Josh. 24:15).

(3) Be households of faith, govern your families in the fear of God and hope of his mercy.

(4) You worldly, ignorant, carnal parents, masters and heads of families, will it be comfortable parting at death from your children and from your servants when you go out of this world, not only with the guilt of your own sins, but that of your children and servants as well? You say you believe in Christ, and yet live without repentance; this faith the Scripture calls historical, and it is the faith of devils; such believers are mockers and impostors.

8. The Lord have mercy upon all such families that do not call on his name and grant them grace to reform their houses to true Christianity for their own sake, as well as the benefit of their succeeding posterity at the great day of the Lord's appearance.

a) Then may God put his name in their houses, leaving the guarantee of a blessing and not of a curse upon the surviving generation, for the Lord our God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation, of them that hate him, and showing mercy unto thousands, of them that love him and keep his commandments.

b) To him, the habitation of whose throne are justice and judgment, and before whose presence are mercy and truth, be glory and worship from all families for evermore. Amen, and amen.