

**“Remember from where you have fallen.” (Rev 2:5a)**

**There are three high points in church history: The early church, the Reformation and the First Great Awakening.**

**Reminder: If we are going to really learn, we must be willing to stretch beyond our culture, our denomination and our generation.**

**History is important because God speaks through what He does as well as through what He says.**

### **The Early Church**

Early Christian worship at home always centered on a shared meal.

Scripture reading and teaching were included, along with prayer and singing.

Note that **Paul taught from “house to house.” (Acts 20:20)**

In the spirit of scripture, listen to the words of the early church fathers.

**Ignatius of Antioch (50-107 A.D.)**, who was **mentored by the Apostle John**, said:

“Fathers...teach [your children] the holy scriptures and also trades, so that they may not indulge in idleness.”  
(The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians)

Concerning marriage, **Tertullian (155-230)** writes,

“What a union of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and **one worship!** They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, **one spirit and one flesh**. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They **pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort, and support each other**. They go together to the church of God and to the table of the Lord. They share each other’s **tribulation, persecution and revival**. **Neither conceals anything from the other. Neither avoids, neither annoys the other**. They **delight** to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without restraint, and in daily zeal lay up their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance...**Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God**. Christ rejoices when He sees and hear this He gives them His peace. Where two are together in His name, there He is, and **where He is, there the evil one cannot come**.”

(cited in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, pp. 364-5)

**Question: How many couples do you know who live like this?**

**What do you see here that we should pray that God would restore to Christian marriages?**

**John Chrysostom (347-407)** encouraged every head of the family to be a spiritual shepherd, noting that he must give an account for both his children and his servants. (Schaff, vol. 3, p. 545)

### **The Decline of Family Worship in the Early Roman Church**

Soon thereafter, however, the spiritual leadership of the family was dealt a blow from the most unlikely of sources: **the church itself.**

**The emerging Roman church was free from persecution after 313 A.D.**

**Reasons for the decline:** By the end of the fourth century, monasticism had been embraced by the church. **Some of the “faithful” left their families to join these monastic orders.** (Schaff, vol. 3, pp. 214-216) **Celibacy was viewed as somehow being more spiritual than marriage.**

Family life was viewed as somehow inferior and thus,

**the spiritual leadership of a father/husband came to be viewed as almost a contradiction in terms.** (Schaff, vol 2, pp. 391, 395)

Soon bishops were expected to be celibate, as well, even though they were not monastic. (Schaff, vol. 2, 412-13) **In 385 A.D., Pope Siricius banned clergy marriages.** (Schaff, vol. 3, p. 247)

This decision was supported by the Roman emperor. (Ptacek, p. 43)

Almost at the same time, **the veneration of Mary** became a widespread doctrine of the church. **The church began to teach that her virginity was perpetual, not just prior to the birth of Jesus, as scripture teaches.** (Ptacek, p. 44)

On top of this, family instruction faced another unlikely antagonist: **the advent of church buildings.**

The first church building was erected in 230 A.D. (Schaff, vol. 2, p. 200),

**but the golden age of cathedral construction did not come until after the church was freed from persecution in 313.**

After that time, the building of Christian houses of worship became more and more common, eventually being sanctioned and funded by the state during the reign of Constantine. (Ptacek, p. 44)

Early Christian gatherings were in the homes of believers.

**Now they were in larger buildings, losing both the intimacy and the family atmosphere of the early church.**

(Note that churches that are exploding today have cell groups that meet in homes.)

**Worse still, was the practice of seating in these church buildings.**

Kenneth Scott Latourette, in *A History of Christianity, Vol. I. Beginnings to 1500*, (pp. 201-2) tells us:

When the congregation gathered, the men were on one side of the church and the women on the other... The youths were by themselves, sitting or standing. The older people were to sit and the mothers with children had a special place.”

Contrast this practice with the truth of God, found in Exodus 10:9.

Here, God speaks to us through a conversation between Moses and Pharaoh.

As background to this passage, when Moses originally went to Pharaoh,

he (Moses) requested that the Israelites be let go so that they might worship Yahweh at Mount Sinai, where God had spoken to Moses in the burning bush.

Pharaoh originally dismissed Moses’ demand out of hand.

But now, after several plagues had weakened his kingdom, Pharaoh was willing to strike a compromise with Moses: **The men alone may go, but the women and children must stay.”**

Here is Moses’ response:

“Moses said, ‘We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.’ ” (NASU)

God does not desire worship to be segregated along gender or generational lines.

God wants us to worship Him as families.

We live in a church culture that has sadly mimicked the world.  
The world has taught us to divide ourselves along generational lines.  
Age-graded Sunday Schools were patterned after the teachings of Horace Mann, and how he thought the public schools should be patterned after factories. Imagine!  
Churches that are copying the pattern of factories!

When families visit most churches, the first thing they do when they get out of the car is scatter!  
The youth go one place, the children go to another place, the parents go to yet another place, and the same pattern is often repeated in church!  
We say the church is a place for the whole family,  
but in many churches, there is rarely a time when the family is actually “whole!”  
What we actually mean is, we have activities for every individual age group,  
but you will never be together as a family.

Billy Graham has rightly lamented the fact that 11:00 to 12:00 on Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour of the week in America.

As true as that is, it is only a fraction of the tragedy!

We are also divided along generational lines

and, as if that weren't enough, we have divided once again over styles of worship.

People who prefer one style come at one time, and people who prefer another style come at another time.

So, what do you do if you have a good friend who prefers the “other” style of worship?

Too bad, styles of worship are more important than relationships.

In fact, styles of worship are now our *basis* for relationships!

*In a broken world, we have nothing more to offer than a pathetically balkanized church!*

*What kind of a witness is that? Do not even the heathen do the same???(randall)*

**Thus, family instruction was replaced by church instruction, and the ideal of the family was greatly devalued by the church itself, contrary to the scriptures. The father as the head of the home was replaced by the priests, bishops and the pope as the recognized spiritual leadership in Christian society.** (randall)

### **The Reformation and the Revival of Family Worship**

It took the Protestant reformation to bring us back to our biblical and early historical roots, when it comes to family Bible instruction.

This was largely due to the fact that **the Bible was now available to the masses in their own native tongue,**

whereas it had previously been hoarded by the clergy, who were practically the only ones who understood Latin,

the only language in which the church had allowed the Bible to be translated.

Originally, this was not a problem,

but **with the breakup of the Roman Empire, various new nations developed their own language, often very distinct from Latin,**

rendering the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible) literally unreadable by almost everyone.

**Martin Luther** nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg in **1517**.

By **1526**, **William Tyndale** wrote, “every man ought to preach in word and deed unto his household and to them that are under his governance.” (Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They really Were*, note 96, p. 242)

**The Geneva Bible, printed in 1599**, added notes “for household use.”

It was this Bible that was brought to the New World by the Puritans.

A number of the notes in this Bible spoke in favor of family worship and of biblical instruction from the head of the household.

J. I. Packer notes: “It was the husband’s responsibility to channel the family into religion, to take them to church on the Lord’s Day and to oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home, to catechize the children and teach them their faith, to examine the whole family after each sermon, to see how much had been retained and understood and to fill any gaps in understanding that might remain, to lead the family in worship daily, ideally twice a day, and to set an example of sober godliness at all times and in all manners. To this end he must be willing to take time out to learn the faith that he is charged to teach.” (*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, p. 270).

**In 1643, the Episcopalians, the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians all convened and crafted the Westminster Confession, which was completed in 1649.**

The preface to the Confession was addressed “especially to heads of families.”

A second preface stated: “A family is the seminary of church and state.”

**Worship was broken down into three types: personal, congregational and family.**

**It was taught that the advance of godliness depended on faithfulness in all three disciplines.** (Ptacek, pp. 47-8)

How paltry our measurements of spirituality seem today!

**Question: We measure spirituality by what means?**

**Answer: Church attendance, participation in other church activities, and a daily quiet time.** (randall)

**Directions were given to church leaders to visit the homes of their members, inquiring, among other things, whether they had been consistent in family devotions.**

**After a first and second warning, a head of household was barred from communion for failing to lead his family spiritually.**

**This was not viewed as being abnormal in any way, as churches regularly practiced church discipline then.**

This tells us how widespread family devotions were at that time. (Ptacek, p. 48)

The leaders of the church, as well as heads of households were to encourage private worship, as well. **This was all viewed as the purvey of the church: to encourage godliness outside, as well as inside, the church.**

**Ministers existed, among other reasons, to encourage heads of households to lead their families spiritually.** (randall)

**On Sundays, the entire family discussed what they had learned through the sermon.**

The wife and children were invited to ask questions.

**There was no children’s church. This *was* the time designed for the children to ask questions.**

If a point was made that was hard for children to understand, the father took it upon himself to try to explain, as best he could, what had been shared from the pulpit. (Ptacek, p. 50)

This was a time where the wife could ask her husband a question at home, if she had any, as the scripture directs in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.” (NASU)

**Beyond discussion, the rest of the day was devoted to Bible study, reading, meditation and prayer.**  
(Ptacek, p. 50)

**Family instruction was not optional.**

**Indeed, it was regarded as the highest priority of the Christian home.**

**It was the duty of the father/husband, and his alone.**

**If he were not fit to lead in this way, he was expected to become fit as soon as possible, most notably through personal Bible reading.**

**If he refused to do so, he was to be ashamed of himself, and it was understood that the duty fell to his wife.**

**If she did not take up the responsibility, she was also to be ashamed.**

**In essence, the thinking was, “If he will not do it, shame on him.**

**If she will not take up the mantle which he has discarded, shame on both of them.”**

(The Directory for Family Worship, Section 4)