

“Where Christian Living Begins”

The Scripture text for this message is Psalm 101, the latter part of verse 2: “I will walk with integrity of heart within my own house.” Bible scholars tell us this psalm is an expression of a king or ruler who wants to govern in a righteous and godly way. He pledges himself to integrity from the inside out. Not only will he maintain high ethics in *public* life, but he also realizes he’s accountable to God for what he does in the *privacy* of his own home. He wants to be in *private* what he is in *public*.

Wouldn’t it be great if more leaders were committed to that goal! Our text says, “I will walk with integrity of heart within my house” (Psalm 101:2). *The Message* version puts it this way: “I’m doing the very best I can, and I’m doing it at home, where it counts.”

I think this Scripture applies to more than just leaders and public figures today! We’re *all* a *public* person (what others see) and a *private* person (what we are within ourselves and with our immediate family). I once ran across this line: ***“We are what we are at home.”***

Think about that! Which most accurately describes the person we really are? The person we are in *public* – where often we put our best foot forward, or where we put on a mask, a public persona? Or, the person we are *behind the scenes, around the house* – where we’re least likely to pretend or try to impress? I think there is a lot of truth in the statement, “We are what we are at home.”

It seems to me the place where Christian living ought to begin is in the home. The Bible affirms this. Turn to 1 Timothy 5. Paul is writing to the young pastor Timothy, outlining the responsibilities believers have to members of their families. Remember, in the 1st century there was no Social Security or pensions. In the case of a widow, it fell to a widow’s family to care for her. Paul sees this as a spiritual obligation: “Honor widows who are really widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God’s sight” (1 Timothy 5:3-4). *The Message* has it: “Let them learn that religion begins at their own doorstep” (vs. 4). Then Paul says this: “And whoever does not provide for relatives, especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (verse 8). This is very strong language! If we don’t take care of our rightful responsibilities to our family, we have denied the faith! Spiritual duties begin at home!

Let’s look at another reference from Scripture (and there are others we could use). We will reference here Ephesians 5:21 through 6:4. Here, believers are given guidance on how to relate to different family members.

Ephesians 5:21: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This is a word for *all* Christians, including those in families.

Ephesians 5:22: “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.” Here is a word for wives. But these instructions should go along with how the husbands are to treat their wives, which we find in the next verses.

Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” And also verse 28: “In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

Ephesians 6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Children are given obligations in this verse.

Ephesians 6:4 : “And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Fathers – parents – too, have moral and spiritual obligations to their children.

Now hear this! Nowhere in the Bible does it suggest that it is OK to live as a Christian in the outside world, and behave like a jerk or an unbeliever at home!

Isn't it something how sometimes we can be so nice to others and so crummy to our own family members! See if any of these scenarios seem familiar!

You're at home, in a grumpy mood, a real bear. Growling at everybody. Making things miserable. The phone rings. You answer, and you're just so sweet! “Hi! How are ya?...I'm good, thanks!” (while others in your family are listening and just rolling their eyes and thinking, “Gimme a break!”).

Or this: You're getting ready for church or Sunday School. Arguing with the kids. Maybe you're having a tiff with your husband or wife. You get into the car, a scowl on your face. But you walk into church, and put on a nice smile. Mr. Wonderful. Ms. Congeniality. (Of course, aren't we all such wonderful, smiley people here at church)! After the service you get in the car to go home, take off your smiley face, and resume where you left off – growling, fussing, being just ugly to one another.

I look back and laugh at some pastoral visits I've made over the years. I come up to a house, and can hear a mom or dad yelling at the kids or people arguing in the house. At that point I have this strong urge to just quietly tiptoe away. But I take a deep breath, then ring the doorbell. Mom, or dad, comes to the door, looking a bit frazzled, and as soon as he or she recognizes that it's the pastor, “Oh, hi Pastor Harry!” I know they have to be thinking: “Of all times for the pastor to come!”

Now I realize nobody can be sweet and nice all the time. And our home can be a place where we can let our hair down and be free to be ourselves – even our miserable selves. We need a place to unwind, where we don't have to pretend. But...isn't there something hypocritical about being a nice person to those on the outside, and being our own worst self at home? What's really scary is the worst case scenario, where someone is ***abusive*** to a family member – but presents as a totally different person to those outside the family. People working with victims of abuse run into this all the time. There is the classic profile of an abuser - someone who is vicious or dangerous in the privacy of their home – but comes across as such a nice person to those on the

outside. Victims of abuse, often when they try to convince others what their spouse or parent is doing to hurt them, find people saying, “I can’t believe this. He’s such a nice guy...she’s such a nice lady.”

The place where Christian living begins is in the home! The writer of Psalm 101 said, “I will walk with integrity of heart within my house” (Psalm 101:2). Are you a Christian? Am I a follower of Jesus? It ought to be seen in the way we treat the people in our family!

This is true in our marriages. Many marriages could be enhanced, even saved, if we just treated our husband or wife as considerately as we do the people at work or the people with whom we socialize. I’ve heard spouses say things like: “He’s so willing to do things for other people. I just wish he’d do some of the things I need him to do around the house.” “She’s so nice and sweet to everybody around her – they’d never believe how ugly and nasty she can be to me.” New life can be breathed into our marriages if we treat our partner like we treat some of our friends.

It might just shock our spouse! There’s this guy who tended to be Mr. Christian with people at church, but was pretty thoughtless and selfish in the way he treated his wife. For instance, he’d come home from work (often late, without calling), and when he got home, plop himself on the sofa, read the paper, and wait for his wife to serve the meal. One day he was really convicted how wrong this was, and how he ought to begin to show his love for Christ by treating his wife more thoughtfully. So he decided to leave work a few minutes early, stop by a florist, and get a dozen beautiful roses. When he gets home, he rings the doorbell. When his wife answers, he gives her the flowers, kisses her, and says, “Hon, you are so beautiful, and I love you!” Right away she bursts into tears. “This has been such an awful day. The baby took a drink out of the toilet. The dog grabbed my lunch off the table and ate it. Then your mother called and said she’s coming to stay for a couple of weeks. On top of that, I did the wash and the washing machine sprung a leak and there’s water all over the basement floor. *And now you come home drunk!*”

Well, in spite of the risk of shocking our partner half to death, can we live like a follower of Jesus in the way we treat our husband or wife? ***This goes for the way we treat our children, too.*** The goal of parenting is *not* that our kids *like us* all the time, and that they *agree* with everything we do! Some conflict between parents and children is normal. But, on the other hand, if I’m a *Christian* father or mother, my love for Christ ought to express itself in a loving investment of myself in my son or daughter. There’s something wrong if I have time for others but no time for my children. Something is lacking if I can’t value and respect my kids’ thoughts and feelings.

Colossians 3:21 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” This was a *revolutionary* commandment in that day when children had few rights. It might be just as simple as taking time to do what *they* want to do, or instead of being so quick to point out our children’s faults, we praise them for what’s good about them.

Being a Christian at home applies to kids, in the way we treat our parents! Kids – you say you’re a Christian. Show it by how you act towards mom and dad! I realize children go through developmental stages. As children grow older and (hopefully) begin to form their own identity, kids and parents don’t agree on a lot of things. That can be a normal part of growing up in a healthy way. But the Bible says, “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Remember, mom and dad might just be the “neighbor” that we are to love! Sometimes it may feel like your parents are your “enemies”. Well, remember, too, Jesus said we are to *love* our enemies! A prominent Christian leader once said he knew his son had become a Christian when his son changed the way he talked to his mother.

And get this, kids (and adults) – being a Christian ought to even make a difference in the way we treat our brothers or sisters! Now that’s tough! I know sibling rivalry is a part of growing up. But being mean and hateful to a brother or sister doesn’t stack up with saying we are a disciple of Jesus. There’s this family where the mother was not home for an evening meal. Dad sat down with his 10 year-old son Todd and his 4 year-old daughter Gracie. Gracie thought it cool she got to sit in her mom’s chair, and she played the part really well – kind of bossing her older brother and telling him how to behave at the table. Todd didn’t think much of it. He looked at her with an air of superiority and sarcastically said, “Ok, *mom!* You’re so great – what’s 7 plus 9?” Without batting an eyelash Gracie said, “I’m busy. Ask your dad.”

Now I know – brothers and sisters don’t always get along. But if they’re really following Jesus, it ought to have an influence on how they treat one another. I came across this quote from Mother Theresa: “Love begins at home. We cannot give to the outside what we don’t have on the inside...if I can’t see God’s love in my brother and sister then how can I see that love in somebody else? How can I give it to somebody else?”

The Psalm writer said, “I will walk with integrity of heart within my house” (Psalm 101:2). Or, as *The Message* puts it, “I’m doing the very best I can, and I’m doing it at home, where it counts.”

Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor at the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, was the keynote speaker a few years back at our Annual Conference when it was held in Lancaster. He talked about leaders needing to have integrity (whether they are a pastor, or a leader in the church). He said one of the greatest compliments he heard given a pastor he knew was when someone said of him, “Those who know him the best respect him the most.” Isn’t it a great thing if those who know us the best – our family members – respect us the most because we live with integrity in our home, as well as in public.

The theme of this sermon is pretty plain. I hope we get it. ***Christian living begins at home.***

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