

HOLINESS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

God desires to be made known to the world, so He chose a people on Earth to represent Him to all nations. In times past, the Nation of Israel was given that privilege. "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2).

With Israel's rejection of the Messiah, the Church was called out of the world to be God's earthly representative. To the Church, Peter wrote, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a Holy Nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). What is God's purpose for calling the church? The verse continues, "That you may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

Declaring God to the world is the purpose for which Israel existed and now the Church. For the New Testament saint, God wants our behaviour to be distinctively different. Not different simply for the sake of difference, but distinctively reflective of His character, which is in fact the means by which we, God's people, declare His praises, and in so doing, His presence. But what does distinctive living look like everyday and what is the means by which God extends Himself to the world?

Consider the parting words of Jonathan Edwards to his church in Northampton, Massachusetts. In his closing address he began to speak of weighty matters of theology. But toward the end of his message, he came to one biblical theme that stands above them all, amazingly, it was the topic of parenting. Here are the words of Jonathan Edwards.

"But the due regulation of your families is of no less, and in my mind, and in most respects, of much greater importance. Every Christian family ought to be as it were, a little church consecrated to Christ and holy influenced and governed by God's rules. And the family education and order are some of the chief means of God's grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual."



When you filter through the old English tone, what Jonathan Edwards was saying is simply this: When the Christian family is no longer what it ought to be, everything else that the church does is weakened, if not destroyed, for what we are as a family is what we are as a church. For what is the church but a family of families, and a household of households.

We believe the family is the most fundamental social unit in God's world for Kingdom building purposes. Why? Because the family is the values generating and perpetuating institution of every society. That was true in the old covenant and Israel, and it is true with the new covenant and the church. That is why we believe that parenting, in the mind of God, is a Kingdom matter.

The primary focus of Christian parenting should be defining God to our children, and we believe that task is best accomplished by introducing and guiding our children in, and by, God's moral law.

"Law", isn't that Old Testament stuff? Aren't we "New Testament" people, living in the age of Grace? These

questions are often provoked by the word "law." Like grace, the moral law of God is timeless, just as the character of God is timeless (Hebrew 13:8). It is derived from both the Old and New Testaments. When we refer to God's moral law, we are not referring to the codified laws given to Israel by Moses, although many of God's moral precepts are found in the Mosaic Law. Rather, we are speaking of the relational commands of God that reflect His heart, will and character. The moral law of God is a relational prescription for a healthy life, prescription that starts in the family and is passed on from generation to generation through God's kingdom builders - parents.

But there's much more. Enjoying wonderful relationships within our families and communities is not the ultimate purpose of character training. Biblical virtues and values, the building blocks of God's moral law, lived out in the Christian family and community serves a greater purpose. By our behaviour, we are to help define God to the world, so the world can find God. That is the essential purpose of a holy lifestyle.

"For our children, the moral law of God is not only a standard and means by which we restrain habits of sin, but it is the means by which we demonstrate His love, mercy and justice. Not only are we defining God to the world, we are defining God to our children."

Holiness for the Christian and Christian family is not something we are, as much as it is something we do. It is a call to distinctive living and moral accountability. Through our holy lifestyle, we make God known to the world. That is why the Apostle Paul told the early church that: "Whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). In its simplest form, the word "glory", means to make bigger, to magnify. We make something bigger so more people can see it. How do we make God bigger to the world? Jesus said it very simply. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good behaviour and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). Our good behaviour, governed by the moral law of God, is the most concrete form of Christian witness and is the means by which we define God to the world, and help the world find God.



This is why moral training in the Christian community and the Christian home, is so important. The results of morally beautiful behaviour, reflective of Christ, become a compelling testimony declaring the praise of Him who called us out of darkness, into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). That is why we passionately teach our children about the preciousness of others, how to show kindness, gentleness and preference of others, and all the virtues that make up God's character. That is why we teach in Growing Kids God's Way, that our children's holiness is more important than their happiness.

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