

Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church  
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[www.macedoniapbc.org](http://www.macedoniapbc.org)  
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**The Priority of Family Worship**  
**By: Elder Michael Gowens**

*“...and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15*

Some seventy-five years ago, J. Gresham Machen wrote, “The most important educational institution is not the pulpit or the school, important as these institutions are; but is the Christian family. And that institution has to a very large extent ceased to do its work.” The lack of personal discipline Machen decries is, without question, the single most influential factor in the lamentable domestic scene today. More recently, Allan Bloom compared today’s family with families of previous generations:

“It was the home – and the houses of worship related to it – where religion lived. The holy days and the common language and set of references that permeated most households constituted a large part of the family bond and gave it a substantial content. Moses and the Tables of the Law, Jesus and his preaching of brotherly love, had an imaginative existence. Passages from the Psalms and the Gospels echoed in children’s heads. Attending church or synagogue, praying at the table, were a way of life, inseparable from the moral education that was supposed to be the family’s special responsibility in this democracy....The loss of the gripping inner life vouchsafed to those who were nurtured by the Bible must be primarily attributed not to our schools or political life, but to the family, which, with all its rights to privacy, has proved unable to maintain any content of its own. The dreariness of the family’s spiritual landscape passes belief.”

I agree. Somewhere in the past fifty years, the family lost its spiritual moorings, and both the church and society are reaping the consequences of its lack of direction.

Most people, self included, live at a breakneck pace. Our lives are haphazard and chaotic. The sheer pace of daily responsibilities tends to a certain kind of fatigue, both physical and spiritual. Constantly intending to put our lives in order, we never seem to actually get around to it. “We need to make some changes around here,” thinks the mother, “and we will...real soon ~ but not tonight; I’m physically exhausted. Right now, I just want a few quiet moments in front of the television ~ to sort of ‘unwind’. But soon ~ yes, soon, we’ll get back on track.” Sound familiar?

I like to think that the problem with most families is not laziness so much as disorganization. We fail at the level of planning. Because our lives are not thought out in advance, each day tends toward randomness. Yes, structure and organization is present, but only in terms of the public dimension of professional obligation. The home, on the contrary, gets the leftovers. Stressed to the limit by daily time and other pressure demands, modern families have adopted a new attitude toward the home. No longer is it the center of family life as it was when the whole family worked to maintain the farm or some other family oriented business. With the urbanization of society has come a whole new set of values and standards. The vocabulary is the same (viz. We still talk about ‘home’), but the dictionary has changed. Home, now, is synonymous with leisure. It is the ‘get-away’ from the ‘rat-race’ ~ four walls, a roof, a bed, a lounge chair, and a big

screen TV, complete with remote control and built-in VCR. This kind of thinking is so entrenched in our modern view of life that any suggestion that 'home' is a synonym for 'work, diligence, effort, and organization' is foreign to the point of repulsion.

Timothy's home was certainly not a perfect environment for spiritual nurture (his father was an unbeliever, leaving his mother with the entire responsibility of his training in godliness), but it was a home in which the word of God was given priority. From the earliest days of his childhood, Timothy was taught the holy Scriptures. We can be sure that his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois worked diligently and systematically in their attempts to saturate his mind with the Psalms and the Proverbs, the Pentateuch and the Prophets. His spiritual and moral tutelage was their priority.

Entertainment, on the contrary, is the priority of the modern family. Our generation is quickly becoming a group of entertainment addicts. We cannot live without our daily "fix" of technological amusement. Furthermore, with the new "technicolor ethic," there is a growing disdain for theology and scholarship so that even "churches" are catering to the popular appetite for a fast-moving, fun-loving, theatrical approach to worship instead of the heavy liturgical forms and cumbersome theological tones of a former day. How does one stop the "dumbing down" effect of the culture on the Church? How does one convince others that we are not richer, but inexpressibly poorer, for trading a God-centered doctrinal Christianity for a man-centered experiential Christianity? Is God glorified when we settle for mediocrity instead of strive for excellence?

The only way to resist the subtle (yet rapid) influx of the spirit of the world into the church is by a recovery of the Biblical emphasis on child training. We must train a new generation to think Biblically so that once again, "passages from the Psalms and the Gospels will echo in their heads." Then, instead of an addiction to television, our homes will be like the household of Stephanas, a family who was "addicted to the ministry of the saints" (I Cor.16:15). A local church made up of individual families whose lives revolve around the hearing and doing of God's word will have an unusual impact on its community. Aside from a fresh work of revival in churches as they exist today (a prospect that is not beyond God's power, but one that man cannot manufacture or orchestrate), the future looks rather grim. What can we do? We can pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then commit ourselves anew to "strengthen what remains" by the recovery of a disciplined approach to teaching our children. On the manward side, the greatest influence we can have on the future of the church will be the spiritual education of the next generation.

Elder Sylvester Hassell, in answer to the question "Ought worship to be kept up in our families, as among God's people in olden times?", wrote, "The decline of family religion is one of the saddest marks of these last, evil, and perilous times. True religion is for the individual, the family, and the community, as well as for the church. It is not simply for public use on one or two days of the week. It is the spiritual life of its possessor, and should be manifested continually in our dealings with God, and with our families, and with our fellow men...Family worship is of far more importance than Sunday Schools, theological seminaries, and protracted meetings. Its neglect among the

people of God is a sure sign of their growing worldliness, covetousness, and carnality.”  
(From *The Gospel Messenger*)

Whenever God has been pleased to awaken the slumbering consciences of His people in revival, one of the first marks that characterized the work of reformation was the recovery of family religion in the home. It has been suggested that the Protestant Reformation would have quickly died away had it not been for the faithful men who daily led their families in worship. Further, when the Puritan Richard Baxter first went to Kidderminster (a town of about 2000 adults, plus children) its citizens were vulgar and crass, but by the time he was forty-five years of age, he had evangelized almost the whole town. There was at this point, according to Baxter’s own testimony only one or two houses on every street where one could not expect to hear prayers, Bible reading, and the singing of spiritual hymns every evening. “Small Group” meetings, some would no doubt be surprised to realize, are not a new phenomena today. In fact, the idea of *Ecclesiola in ecclesia* (the little church within the church) in which the corporate body of the local assembly is strengthened in its larger work by the daily, ongoing exercises of small “cell” groups has its Biblical basis in the concept of Family Worship. Strong churches, in other words, grow out of strong and devout families.

In Deuteronomy 6, the Lord insists upon the priority of family worship. At first glance, it may appear that the only lesson here is the importance of using those spontaneous, unstructured moments in each day to teach God’s word to our children: “...thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest about the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up...” (v.7). Every day offers numerous unstructured opportunities to instruct our children and to re-enforce the principles of the word of God. The word of God should be such a part of our lives that it permeates the very fabric of daily family experience.

The command “Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,” however, affirms that there is a place for structured, methodical training, even beyond those sudden unplanned opportunities in the course of the day. The Hebrew word translated “diligently” means “to inculcate,” that is, “to endeavor to force or impress an idea on the mind of another by emphatic admonition or persistent repetition” (Oxford English Dictionary). The thought of disciplined and structured training is intrinsic to the word. That Jewish father’s understood this verse to teach the principle of family worship is evident by the priority they gave to systematic training:

“Each father was duty bound to teach his son whatever measure of Torah-learning he himself possessed. This was to be in fulfillment of the Scriptural precept: ‘And ye shall teach them [the Commandments] to your children.’ It is a singular fact that in no other religion has it been a categorical ‘must’ for parents to assume the primary responsibility *as educators* of their own children. Among the Jews, in former times, this task was considered to be an all-important and sacred dedication. ‘Blessed is the son who has studied [Torah] with his father, and blessed is the father who has instructed his son!’...” (*The Book of Jewish Knowledge*, pp. 156-157; Emphasis in original).

The godly, Puritans, also, recognized the priority of family worship. They viewed the family, as J.I. Packer notes, as “a little church in itself, with the husband as its pastor and his wife as his assistant...It was the husband’s responsibility to channel the family into religion; to take them to church on the Lord’s Day, and oversee the sanctifying of that entire day in the home; to catechize the children, and teach them the 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 matters. 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).

The stereotypical view most modern people have of the Puritans, I suggest, is not entirely accurate. The term itself conjures up images of a heavy-handed, overly rigid, censorious, and legalistic approach to life. That stereotype, I say again, though true of some who were called “Puritans,” was not the rule among the Richard Baxter, Richard Sibbes, William Gurnall, Thomas Brooks, William Gouge, Jeremiah Burroughs, Jonathan Edwards, and Thomas Goodwin brand of ‘Puritanism.’ These men had a warmth of devotion to Christ, a passion for godliness, a compassion for the bruised and broken, and a concern for genuine heart religion that excelled any group of Christians since the early church. Puritan preachers, writes Gaius Davies, “stressed that love is the fountain of all parent’s duties, but children should not be spoiled...The child’s first instruction in religion should be adapted to its age, so that the child receives it with delight. Thus the seeds of godliness would be planted early.” (Ibid., p. 271).

Family worship was once a staple of Christian families. A dear saint in our church here tells of his fond memories in childhood when his father and mother would take the Scriptures at the close of the day, read and discuss a chapter in the quietness of the home, bow in prayer, then send the children off to bed. The regularity of this family discipline made a profound impression upon this aged believer. Today, he rises up and calls his parents “blessed.”

I am thankful to see a resurgence of interest among young families in the practice of daily family devotion. One couple I know has a family time each morning about 7 a.m. prior to sending the kids off to school. They testify that the renewing of their minds with God’s word makes a profound impact on the way they approach the entire day. They have noticed as a result of their efforts a greater spiritual interest in their children toward the church and public worship.

Whether or not one is skilled in teaching, and even though at times the observance of family devotion will seem a drudgery, or the lesson will be less than interesting to the children, or the entire time will be spent battling to keep their attention or to overcome their murmuring and complaining, the regular practice of family worship will have an incalculable benefit on children, merely by virtue of the fact that it sends the silent message to them that you love the Lord and them enough to take the time to train them. Further, a few activities will help Christian families to recover the spirit of filial piety in

which children honor and obey their parents out of a sense of love and worship to God, like the practice of family devotion. The breakdown of “filial piety,” that is, the general loss of respect and reverence for one’s parents, is one of the saddest features of the modern family.

Personally although I can’t explain it, our family operates much more smoothly when we keep up family worship. Attitudes are better and tones of voice are kinder. I’ve also noticed a decline in sarcasm and sullenness as the crass and crude attitudes fostered by the world are daily challenged by the excellence, beauty, purity and grace of our Lord’s teachings. I am an unabashed believer in the priority of family worship.

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While in prayer over whether or not to undertake a quarterly newsletter, the previous article came to my mind. It was written by Elder Michael Gowens several years ago. Although the text was penned in years past, the words are no less applicable now. As our society continues to watch the family structure crumble, may we as God-fearing Christians take the necessary steps to build our homes on the Solid Rock of Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is my hope and prayer that among the New Year’s resolutions that are made this week, each one of us make it a goal to perform daily devotionals in our home.

In His Love,



Elder Will Martin

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**Church Announcements:**

1. Bethany Primitive Baptist Church-Tucker, GA: On Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, Bethany will ordain Brother Coy Thomas to the office of Elder. Services will begin at 10:30 on Saturday morning to be followed with lunch and the ordination service in the afternoon. Please continue to pray for Brother Coy as this date approaches.
2. Harmony Primitive Baptist Church-Calhoun, GA: On Saturday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, Harmony will host a Marietta Old School Associational Fellowship meeting. Services will be held Saturday Morning at 10:30 with lunch and afternoon services following. This is (I hope) the first of many more fellowship meetings to come.
3. Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup> @ 9:30, we will have a clean up day at Macedonia.
4. Friday, Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, Feb 7<sup>th</sup>: Macedonia will have Elder Ricky Harcrow and Elder John Melvin with us for services starting at 7:00 P.M. both evenings. Please continue in prayer that the Lord will richly bless those meetings.

5. Saturday April 18<sup>th</sup>: Macedonia will be hosting the Marietta Old School Associational Union Meeting. Services will begin on Saturday morning with lunch and afternoon services following.

**Church Photos:**



We thank the Lord for the opportunity to sing with Sister Parker. We are also thankful for the ones from our sister churches who could attend. We look forward to having the singing again this spring, Lord willing.