

Rediscovering FAMILY WORSHIP



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REDISCOVERING
THE LOST TREASURE
OF FAMILY WORSHIP

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Introduction

“Because the Christian is not his own, but bought with a price, he is to aim at glorifying God in every relation of life. No matter what station he occupies, or wherever he be, he is to serve as a witness for Christ. Next to the church of God, his own home should be the sphere of his most manifest devotedness unto Him. All its arrangements should bear the stamp of his heavenly calling. All its affairs should be so ordered that everyone entering it should feel ‘God is here!’”

— A.W. Pink

For some odd reason progress usually makes people despise the past, as if it no longer offers anything of any relevant value. This mindset is particularly true of the present generation who live in a lonely age of space exploration, CD-Roms, the Internet, and cellular technology. Even among today’s professing Christians there is a subtle rejection of historic Christianity, at the expense of remaining restless in their shallow fads without knowing why. But what will return the Christendom of this present generation to a salty Christianity (Matthew 5:13)? What will return modern-day Christendom to a Christianity that will act as a preserving agent to a decaying society? What can offer certain hope to a nation of families that are in utter disarray? Answer: A present return to the old paths. It was the prophet Jeremiah who said, *...ask for the*

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ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls (Jeremiah 6:16).

The Puritans in early America serve as a good example to orient us into our present discussion.



Let me now therefore, once more, before I finally cease to speak to this congregation, repeat, and earnestly press the counsel which I have often urged on the heads of families, while I was their pastor, to great painfulness in teaching, warning, and directing their children; bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord; beginning early, where there is yet opportunity, and maintaining constant dilligence in labours of this kind.



— Jonathan Edwards

A LESSON FROM THE PAST

The Puritans of colonial New England were fond of comparing their venture in America to the genesis of Israel. They also believed that their flight from Europe was like the exodus out of Egypt; America herself was often called the Promised Land;¹ the “city-set-on-a-hill” community of believers in America was to be a light to the other nations of the world, just as God had intended Israel to be (Isaiah 49:6).

This pattern can be seen most clearly and importantly in the matter of family worship. Here, as in the Old Testament, the Puritan father was expected to be the religious leader of the home, enjoined by God Himself to lead his family daily in the worship of Jehovah. This practice was seen as the most primary function in preserving Christianity on early America’s soil. And yet, as with Israel, less than a century had passed before this was the very realm in which backsliding was so prevalent. Listen to these observations from the past:

- In 1679 the Synod of New England gathered at Boston in response to a request by the General Court of the Massachusetts Colony to supply an answer to the following question: *What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to*

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bring judgments upon New England? These representative church leaders responded with fourteen reasons, the sixth of which reads:

There are many families that do not pray to God constantly, morning and evening, and many more where the Scriptures are not daily read so that the Word of Christ might dwell richly in them. There are too many houses that are full of ignorance and profaneness and that are not duly examined and for this cause wrath may come upon others round about them as well as upon themselves (Joshua 22:20; Jeremiah 5:7; 10:25). Many householders who profess religion, do not cause all that are within their gates to become subject unto good order as they ought (Exodus 20:10)... Most of the evils that abound among us proceed from defects in family government.²

- A century later, in 1766, the great American Baptist leader Isaac Backus (1724-1806) wrote for his generation:

New England has formerly been a place famous for religion in general, and for family worship in particular. But of late, the neglect of this, as well as of other religious duties, has evidently been growing upon us; which has caused much grief to pious souls. But I have not heard that any discourse has been published upon this subject here these many years . . . as there have lately been numbers remarkably awakened in some parts of the land, who were trained up in the neglect of Family Prayer, and who are still at a loss about the Scriptural authority for the daily practice thereof.³

- And in 1847 the venerable Presbyterian minister James W. Alexander commented about the obvious decline of this most blessed duty:

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Our church cannot compare with that of the seventeenth century in this regard. Along with Sabbath-Observance, and catechizing of children, Family-Worship has lost ground. There are many heads of families, communicants in our churches, and (according to a scarcely credible report) some ruling elders and deacons, who maintain no stated daily service of God in their dwellings.⁴

These sad reports from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries pale in comparison to the far worse observations that could be made in our own time. The decline has been steady with little to no recovery of the former zeal. And yet the Word of God tells us that such times will not always continue. Psalm 22:27 reminds us that someday *all the families of the nations shall worship before You*. With this hope in hand it is incumbent upon us to rekindle the fire that may well restore vital Christianity in our nation.



It is highly honorable to family-worship, as a spiritual service, that it languishes and goes into decay in times when error and worldliness make inroads in the church.



— James W. Alexander





No man can approach the duty of leading his household in an act of devotion, without solemn reflection on the place which he occupies in regard to them. He is their head. He is such by Divine and unalterable constitution. These are duties and prerogatives which he cannot alienate.



– James W. Alexander

