

The Family

God has established three estates for our blessing and benefit. They are: The family, the church, and the government. The family is the fundamental and the most important of the three estates. To the extent that the family succeeds, both the church and the state may prosper. To the extent that God's arrangement for family life is despised and set aside, to that extent both church and state are threatened and weakened. Indeed, the destruction of the state and of civil society almost always has the decay of the family at its root and its primary cause.

The young especially need to be carefully instructed in God's intentions for our blessing through His institution and regulation of family life. That is so in order that they may give God's intentions for them careful thought as they set about forming families of their own. Such instruction is of vital importance especially because society and often its elders have made such a mess of family life that decent models of God-pleasing family life may be very hard to find.

What then does God's Word have to say about the family? First of all, we note already at the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1, 2) that God established three basic purposes for marriage and the family. He declared that it would not be good for Adam to remain alone and without human companionship. And so, as His greatest gift to Adam, God created Eve and gave Adam and Eve to each other. Their companionship was a great gift and blessing indeed and a primary purpose of marriage; companionship remains a blessing and purpose that God still intends for marriage.

The second purpose that God gave for marriage in the Garden of Eden was the bearing and rearing of children (Genesis 1:28). Children are spoken of in the Bible as a blessing of the Lord. Psalm 127 reads, ¹ *If the LORD does not build a house, those who have been building it have been labouring over it in vain. If the LORD does not watch over a city, the watchman has been staying alert in vain. ² It is in vain for you to get up early, to stay up until late, and to eat hard-won food. For He certainly gives sleep to those whom He loves. ³ Indeed, children are an inheritance from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. ⁴ Children who have been born in one's youth are like arrows in the hand of a warrior ⁵ Blessed is the man who has filled his quiver with them! Such men will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies at the city-gate.*

It is from children that we gain a special insight into the grace and love of God. For just as children can neither earn nor repay their parents for their status as children and for the love and care lavished on them by their parents, so also we as children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. We too can neither earn nor deserve that status, nor ever repay God our Father for the love and care that He lavishes on us.

At the same time we imitate His love and grace in caring for the children that God entrusts to our care. Additionally, in the simplicity and trust of little children we see again the nature of that faith which we have in God as our Father; we get to understand just a little bit better and with greater appreciation what it means when we are called the children of God. Yes, and not least we have the honour of being missionaries as we give back to God at their baptisms the children He has given us. What an honour God has given to parents that parents should imitate God's love for them as they love and train their children with His Word.