



## The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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### **The Christian Home**

We would like to develop our thoughts around the home. I reflected on a number of homes in the Old Testament. There is Abraham of whom God says, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him" (Genesis 18:19). "Here is a man that I can share my secrets with." I think of Boaz, whom God was able to use in a dark time. He was able to gain a foothold and to carry on

His purposes. Many of the outstanding homes in the Old Testament were built in times where it would seem that it was not possible to build.

Today we face maybe, a similar situation, where it would seem like there is much arrayed against the building of a Christian home. Nevertheless, we can, by the power of God, by the grace of God, by simply employing the principles of God,

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have Christian homes even in this day. These are homes that do not need to succumb to the pressures of our day. That kind of home will not simply happen automatically. It will require effort and toil. There are individuals sometimes who would like to have a good home but fail to meet the demands or the conditions that are necessary. There are things that we must do if we will have the blessing of the Lord.

I have chosen to look at the

Proverbs 31 as a basis of the message. This chapter refers to a woman, or what is a good wife. Sometimes you may say “Well, this chapter is directed to wives,” possibly so. However, if you look at the broader book of Proverbs you will come to discover that a thought of a woman is related to wisdom. Therefore, I believe there is a broader application for us in Proverbs 31 than merely instruction for the sisters. The broader connotation of wis-

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dom is in focus in this chapter as well. Therefore, it applies to both sides of the house. We would like to apply it from that way.

I will simply take the passage and work through it, and notice a number of principles as it relates to home building or essentials for a Christian home. We want to simply notice the direction that this Scripture gives. Possibly we should read the whole chapter before so that we have the connections. Read Proverbs 31:1–31.

1) *Let us notice a number of essentials for Christian homes that will endure and produce.* We are interested in homes that will finally communicate the faith. That is what we are interested in really. That is the only goal. That is the primary goal. It is the thing that ought to be the sharpest in our focus. Sometimes men of this world look at home life and say, “We trust we can earn enough so that we can provide for the family, so that our children do not need to go through all we had to go through.” Really that is a goal of death, and our chief desire ought to be that the faith is handed on. We want to notice a number of principles found in this passage.

1) *The essential of a proper foundation.* We notice this in

verse 1, “The prophecy that his mother taught him.” She appeals to him in verse 2. We also notice in verse 10 that there is a virtuousness and a quality there. The truth that I see is that in order for us to have the kind of homes that will produce the faith, we must have regard to the truth. We must have regard to a spiritual relationship with the Lord. That comes in focus here. “That his mother taught him.” Most of us have had that advantage. Most of us have had fathers and mothers who taught us. However, if there are any here who did not, you still heard the truth. Therefore, the challenge is that we respond to the truth that we have heard regardless of how it has come to us.

Verse 10 also brings purity into focus. It tells us of a wholesome life to this point, and involving courtship, and all of that is part of a proper foundation. We cannot behave as the world then have a home that is different from the world. We must have a connection with the Lord.

2) *Another essential is a home centred lifestyle.* There is no verse for this in particular, but, as I read this passage one gets the feel of home. One gets the feeling that it was simply good to be home. It was good to have things

gathered around home. Yes, the husband was found at the gate some, apparently out of necessity, but home was the centre here. I believe that we ought to have that. When work is over and you are working away from home you go home. There are some things that actually hinder this kind of home centred lifestyle. A free attendance, for example, to the local restaurant militates against the home-centeredness that this Scripture teaches. We cannot build homes that will be strong if we are patronizing the local restaurants. The two do not go together. You say, "Do you mean it is ungodly to eat in a local restaurant and then it is right when you are on a trip and use a restaurant? Well, that does not make sense." The point is this: that the mind set that would take us to the local restaurant when we have a kitchen at home is a mind set that destroys the home. It destroys the home-centered lifestyle that we should be having.

Long distance truck driving is another issue that finally destroys. We need to watch that we do not over commit ourselves even in the legitimate work and duties of life lest finally, the relationships in the home are dulled and we do not keep alive. It takes time to talk, to share and to show

interest in each other, and to keep alive a relationship that will make home to be the thing that draws us. That does not happen automatically. That needs to be worked at. Therefore, a husband who is working many, many hours away from home needs to watch that when he gets home he gives home the attention it should have, if it will continue to have a home-centered drawing and if the home will be the gravity and the pull as it relates to our social interests in life.

As it relates to growing teenagers home oriented activities is what we look and call for. The point of gravity needs to be the home. When that is not the case, what happens when there is no gravity? What would happen now if suddenly the Lord would turn the gravity off on the earth? I understand that we are spinning in space at something like twenty-nine miles per second. What do you think would happen if the gravity would turn off? Well, I know what would happen, and you know what would happen. The same thing happens sometimes to homes where the home is not the centre point — the gravity — the pull in their social life and experience. Young people get scattered to space and lose their way.

3) *Another essential is*

*absolute fidelity, especially as it relates to husband and wife.* Verse 3, "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings." This speaks of immoral living. Unfaithfulness can happen in actual practice or it can happen in thought life as well. It is possible in the realm of thought life to entertain another person as the ideal, or wish that yours (husband or wife) was more like another, or imagine what it would be like to live with another. Such thoughts eat at the home as the termites can eat at the house. It destroys. It does not take acts of unfaithfulness, but attitudes of unfaithfulness can do the same wreckage. It is the essential of absolute fidelity.

4) *We also notice the essential of a cultivated sobriety.* Notice this. He says, "Do not take strong drink. . . Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted" (verse 4), and as a result be not prepared to give direction to the kingdom. The challenge comes (the principle I see here is not only strong drink though strong drink in one way to lose your sobriety) but one can lose sobriety apart from strong drink. The emphasis is that we should exercise a cultivated sobriety. This does mean that we must

always have a long face and never smile or never laugh. I do not believe that is what it is teaching at all. In fact, I believe that there is a place for wholesome "teasing" or laughing and simply enjoying each other in the relationships at home. That is part of a good home. Certainly, that is not what it is talking about here.

Rather, it means that in our homes we have a proper focus, and proper goals in life. Life is more than making a living, and enjoying each other merely. Life is more and marriage and homes are more than simply a happy ever after fairy tale. In fact that is unreal and one will not find it that way. The wheels of time are propelling us onto an eternal destiny. In light of that we need to have some goals. We need to know where we are going. We need to recognize that as these wheels are moving us onto an eternal destiny, we will, in time, give an account of our stewardship. That sobriety should create, and bear down on us a sobriety and a consciousness that will keep us going right.

This relationship that each husband and wife has and the relationships in the home with the children and all are very temporary at the best. One ought to reflect on that. The Lord is giv-

ing us this moment and the next moment to count for Him, not ourselves. Therefore, we need to have that kind of focus. One is impressed with this as we get older. I am sure to those who are newlyweds, twenty years to be married seems like a long time. There are probably some here that have been married forty or fifty years and that seems like a long time to some of us. However, I am sure that as time moves on, we will discover that it simply is not very long.

Some things (I find this in my own life) at one point seemed so important at this vantage point do not seem very important, in light of weightier issues. Therefore, we must have that kind of focus. Cultivate a sobriety, a sense of direction, and a sense of focus that keeps us on the go. My wife and I, the other night, were making rows in the garden. That is an awful thing for me to do. I do not know how you find it husbands, but I have an awful time making straight ones, and without a string. My wife said, that her father would get on the hands on this hand plow and he would focus on something and he would aim for it, and it would get straight. Well. That is what we need to do in home life. Get your eyes on the right focus to get the row straight, and to get it done

right. God help us to have that kind of sobriety and that kind of burden.

5) *In verse 10 we see the essential of a valued relationship.* “For her price is far above rubies.” This tells me that we ought to view the relationships in the home as very valuable, and as that which is we protect. Even genuine love is fragile. It must be maintained and protected. The keen edge of a rewarding relationship can be dulled through the neglecting of each other. We would say we would still love each other. There is no quarrelling, no feelings of hatred, no breakdown of respect, but we simply do not have the sense of warmth and closeness that we have known in the past. Do things together. Share things. Someone says “In some homes all you hear is who will pay this bill and who will pick up the school children and what will you do today.”

In our home relations we need to get to heavier things. Those things are necessary but we need to get to heavier things. We need to be discussing our convictions. We need to be discussing the ideals. We need to be discussing the things that sometimes hurt, or the things that sometimes irritate. Those things need to be discussed. Those things need to be

worked out. We need to value the relationship so that these kinds of things are happening, and the right things are happening. Home life can be a lifetime of adventure (not adventure in the carnal sense) in a noble sense.

6) *We also notice in verse 11 the essential of mutual trust.* “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.” Trust is based on and relates to openness. Sometimes individuals are tempted to avoid a certain issue. There is nothing that will destroy relationships faster than when one or the other senses that there is some issue that they cannot talk. That is true in church life is it not? Certainly, that is true in home life and in many relationships. There should be an openness with nothing to hide. They should be completely open. Husbands, it is good for us that our wives always know where we are.

Once in a while I will come home from a meeting and my wife will say, “Now, at which church were you?” I had forgotten to tell her. She knows and I know that it was not intentional. We ought to exercise it that if we will get home late we simply call and we say we are, and why we are. Sometimes there are circumstances where we cannot be

reached, but we can trust with the cheque book, with the car, with the work when we are away. We need to be worthy of such trust. I know of one mother who had her daughters hide some things because father was coming. When that happens, you will not reproduce the faith. It simply will not happen that way. The wife needs to understand that, especially as she gives herself to the leadership of her husband.

A wife or a husband who will share indiscretely to others confidential matters will destroy a relationship in the home as well. I have some weaknesses, my wife does too and I am sure that everyone here does if we will be honest. Nevertheless, for either one of us to exploit that is to destroy the relationship. Sometimes this can happen even in a subtle way like this where the wife will simply go home and complain to her parents or vice versa. If there is help needed there is a right way to do it. Together help can be sought. Or, if the situation is really critical there are proper ways to get help. However, to share freely is to destroy the trust and the confidences.

7) *In verse 12 I see another essential, the essential of fulfilling the needs of the other.* “She will do him good and not evil all

the days of her life.” This is a side that we maybe do not think about as much but especially to the husbands. Your wife needs to feel appreciated and feel that she has been chosen. One man said “I do not understand her. I got her a new this. I got her a new that, and we have all kinds of money. She is in a new house but she is not happy.” The point is that he did not understand what makes for happiness. We somehow need to get through and communicate that our wives mean something to us.

We did that in courtship and how did we do it? Well, when you were dating you tried to be with the other one as much as you could, did you not? You would cross over obstacles to get it done. That communicated the right thing, did it not? You opened a car door for her and that communicated the right thing. You remembered the birthdays. Now we hardly do. It communicates something does it not?

To the other side of the house, your husband needs to be in charge and you need to appreciate his “inchargeness” and communicate with him by tidiness. I recognize that when there is a house full of children, it will not always be just right. We recognize that. However, finally there is a sense that at least that desire

is there. We need to admire his work and be happy with his income and his provisions. We need to be a wife that is satisfied and we are equally happy to be in this home. Seek to please him even in the little things of life. All of those things are part of fulfilling the needs of the other.

8) *Another essential is in verse 13 is fulfilling your role willingly.* Verse 13 says, “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.” Wife is the helpmeet. She is to submit to the leadership. She is to be the mother/teacher. The husband is the family leader, and is the father/teacher, the father/priest, the father/protector. That is all a message in itself. Each one needs to take their role willingly and cheerfully and find fulfillment in that role.

9) *Another essential is found in verses 14 and 15, the essential of sacrificing for others.* “She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar. (15) She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.” Sacrifice. Selfishness destroys happiness. You never get anything by getting, but by giving. That is how one gets. It is by giving. The Scriptures say that. Someone put it this way, “Marriage is not a fifty-fifty

proposition, but a 100% to nothing proposition. When we have that view then we can have healthy homes. We can have homes that will accomplish the right thing. It will take effort, sure. The excitement and the emotion of the first months of marriage will fade, yes. When you are starting on a journey as newlyweds, it will be a journey that actually will even include some of the drudgeries that you have experienced in the past. Yes, it will. We need to understand that, and respond to it correctly.

As in other pursuits, the reward is in the midst of battle. There is where the reward is. It is in the midst of battle. Sacrifice demands effort and one could go into a large list here. It is demanding is it not, to have Christian day schools and to go to all the effort that takes. It is demanding to send our young people to Numidia. It is demanding to see that some of our young people can serve on the foreign fields. It is demanding, but if we have the spiritual eye, we are able to meet those demands and find the blessing in those demands. We will be willing to sacrifice to see things come out right.

10) *Verse 16, gives the essential of a far-seeing perception.* “She considereth a field, and

buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.” I see here a person who was looking to the future. There are some other verses on down that imply the same thing. If we will have homes that come out right, we need to have the ability to see the end of a course. We need the ability to see what it takes to get there. I maybe gave this illustration once before, but I am not a builder. In fact, right now we are doing a little building at home and I am simply not a builder. I can envision what it should look like but I do not know how to get it done. Therefore, I need to hire someone to do it. You would say, “Well, that is too bad.” Well, it is, but that is the way it is.

However, when it comes to spiritual matters none of need to be that way. We can know what it is to look like and we can know how to get there. We cannot simply pass it off and say, “I am sorry, I was not born that way.” Rather, need to assume some personal responsibility for it being that way. God has given us ample provision. Now, it is true that I do not always see through every issue. However, the Lord has given us a church to help us to see through every issue. I am impressed with this. Sometimes we need to stop and reflect how many things that we presently

see through as a result of the church, and how few things we would see through on our own. It humbles us. That is what the church is all about, is it not?

We have a lot emphasis today that the Holy Spirit deals with us as an individual only. Thus, you study your Bible and the Holy Spirit will show you the Bible and then you decide. The Holy Spirit will tell you how make your applications. You make yours. I will make mine. At first it seems logical, and it seems to make sense, but it is not Biblical. The Lord, through the church, helps us to know how to live and to do. 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the corporate body. Every joint fitting together makes the body, not only the joint by itself, but everything compacted together. The Holy Spirit, God works on me through the church, primarily as it comes to convictions and seeing through issues. There are ways where he deals with me personally, and we recognize that, but the Lord is also using the church in a primary and a forefront way. The church will help us.

Sometime ago, I saw a child of some plain parents. (I want to say it that way). I saw that child get on a public school bus. That set me thinking for a long time. What was the vision of those par-

ents? What were they hoping to accomplish? If their goal was right, could they not see that it would never bring it right? We need to be far seeing and have a far seeing perception. What are the implications of, for example, failing to correct and discipline our children? We need to see now what that will produce. If we will only learn it after it is already produced, it is already too late. We need to be learn and understand that now. We need to understand what the product of being borderline members will produce. We need to know that now before it is produced. We need to know where we are going, what produces it, and what brings it about.

We have watched people who live at the edge. We find that it does not take a whole lot to bump them over the edge. We need to understand that and see how it works. Let us observe and see what works and what does not work, and then use that to develop our perception.

11) *In verse 17 there is the essential of the application of truth.* “She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.” The term “girdeth her loins,” often in Scripture has the connection of applying the truth and bringing the loose ends together by making application

to the truth. I was in someone's home recently and they asked "Why do we need standards? Why don't we each simply take the Bible? Isn't the Bible enough?" Well, is not the Bible enough? Do you not agree with that? I do. Sure, the Bible is enough. However, where in the Bible, for example, does it tell us what kind of car to drive if we want to carry the logic along through. Well, nowhere. However, in principle form it does, does it not? Therefore, we are to take the principles of Scripture and apply them to everyday life. That is part of home building.

The Bible does not spell out every detail. Neither can the church spell out every detail. We need to be a people who can make applications to ourselves first. For example, our church discipline does not say what kind of floor covering we must have, what kind of furnishings, what kind of wall paper. Does the Bible therefore give no direction? I believe it does give some direction.

We need to take a number of things into focus. One thing is it should be in harmony with a simple lifestyle that the Scriptures call for. It ought to be such that when people walk into our homes there is no second guess.

They know that we are of another world. They know that we are not simply mimicking the latest colour schemes. They know that we do not simply have the latest piece of furnishing, and they can tell that we are governed by another kingdom. That ought to be showing up in our homes, in our cars, and in everyday life.

12) *Verse 18, gives the essential of appreciating the product of the home.* "She perceiveth that her merchandise is good." In our own homes we dare not live with a defeated feeling about our homes. If there are areas that we know are not right, we need to work hard to get it right. We have the tendency, do we not, yes we know it should be different. Yes, we should improve here, but all the while it keeps on going that direction. As I see it here, it is a person who perceived that the right things were happening and that it was good. We ought to have the same sense in our homes. We should have a certain consciousness of rest and satisfaction. Yet, on the other hand, enough of uneasiness that it keeps us alert and keeps us reaching out to God.

13) *Verse 19 and 20 gives the essential of an outgoing contribution.* "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. (20) She stretcheth

out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." I see a person here of a home that was making an outgoing contribution. Sometimes young couples can only see themselves for a while, but you know that is not where the blessing is. The blessing is in the outgoing contribution. There is a large cause to contribute to. We should be contributing to that cause. Be involved in church life. Be at church services and activities, right from day one. Visit in the congregation on our own initiative. Do not be the kind of home that simply sits and waits until somebody comes, calls to come to see us and then wonder why nobody ever comes. There are people like that sometimes. I have observed that.

A home that is not reaching out often, in the long term feels at a distance, and feels that others are not reaching in. However, it is a two-way street, is it not? Our homes, if they will be strong homes must be making a contribution. Visit the sick and the widows. Witness in the community. Be a stabilizing factor in the church. I see three kinds of homes in church life. There are some homes that are a drag on the church. You work with them, you work with them, but all the while it is a wait. Then, there are

homes that are not necessarily a wait, but neither are they necessarily helping to push. That is another kind of a home. Let us be the kind that are no waits but helping to push the load. Let us be those kinds of homes. There is where the blessing is. That is the kind of home that will reproduce the faith in the rising generation. Be a stabilizing influence.

I have observed that homes can seem like they are going right for a while until they have some children that are growing up. Then, the test is on. When teenagers in their late teens start moving a little in the broader circle sometimes fathers and mothers face a pressure that they had not faced before. It goes a little like this. The child will come home and say, "Why can't we do this? So and so does it." I used to that to my father too. There is sense in which that is normal. However, what father and mother does with that is of utmost importance. Let us be the right kind of home. I know of some parents sometimes that have come to the place where, in the face of that, they would say "Well, what can I say? So and so does it." Where is our conviction? Where is our stability? Let us be the kind of home that is making its contribution to the strengthening of the convictions

of the brotherhood. Let us be that kind of a home and that kind of a family that will help to reproduce the right things in church life.

14) *Verses 21 and 22 the essential of preparedness for conflict.* “She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” Yes, conflict. Disappointments will come. Times of crisis will come, but a daily practical faith in God is preparing us. An inner awareness of being in God’s will and a close family, all of those things are preparing us for crisis and for the conflict.

15) *In verse 23 is the essential of openness to wholesome influences.* “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.” That was good men. There is an openness to wholesome influences. Never be closed to the counsels of good men. Never resent ministerial involvement. Attempt to look through the eyes of those who are older and over you in the Lord. Expose yourself to churchwide influences. Read the church papers. Take an interest in the church issues. That kind of home has a force going on inside the home that cannot always be measured, but it is present, and it is producing the right thing.

Open ourselves to the wholesome influences.

Yes, our young people will go to our Bible schools with no second thoughts because we are there too sometimes. They will find themselves moving at what the church is doing because we are right there moving with it too. Therefore, it is no problem, because we are right in step ourselves. Let us be that kind.

16) *Verse 24 gives the essential of wholesome enterprising.* “She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.” I see wholesome enterprising. She had much to do and had something to even sell. We need to be employing our children in wholesome ways. Regular duties and disciplines of work will not only help them in school but in the Christian life. There is a connection fathers and mothers — a clear connection — between that son having to do something every day and regularly and it is his to do without father always checking. There is a connection between that and being able to live the Christian life.

There is a discipline in the Christian life, is there not? Therefore, if we have never learned that, we are at a disadvantage. It can be something as simple as one of our small boys

at home right now needing to water the pigs every morning and every evening. It is his to do and when he gets a little careless we need to help him to get over it. He needs to find fulfillment in doing that little mundane thing. It is that detail that will help him to live the Christian life in time to come. We need to be producing that kind of thing. A lot of idle time, and a lot of free floating type of atmosphere will not produce that.

17) *The essential of Christian maturity comes in verse 25.* “Strength and honour are her clothing.” I see Christian control here. It is not a pouting kind of person, not babyish, but workable and cooperative. There will be times of adjustments in new homes and something as simple as when to have meals or how to do this or that will take some adjustment. You will need to learn to live together. Some things will come that will tend to aggravate your relationship. Learn to resolve them in a wholesome way. Strength and honour — Christian control.

18) *Verse 26, the essential of respect of courtesy.* “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” Home is not only where you “let your hair down.” Yes, you can your physical hair,

but I am using the idiom. Home is not where you show the ugly side of yourself. We should never allow our home relations to be reduced to simply a careless free happening. There is a place in our homes to say “Excuse me. Thank you. You are welcome. I am sorry.” Those things are right in homes and are proper for wholesome relationships. You say, “Oh well, we will simply elbow our way around and we can be a little careless because everybody understands?” Oh? It usually does not work out that way, does it? I see Christian courtesy in focus here and respect.

Seek to maintain the freshness in the relationship that has existed in your early marriage. The old saying that familiarity breeds contempt need not to be true. Where families allow a free flow of criticism about others, the church, or the government they will find that their own relationships deteriorate.

19) *Also in verse 27 and 28, we see the essential of parental authority.* “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.” There is the principle. Many families look more to the ways of their flocks than to their households. There are some fathers that are more concerned that the

feed gets weighed out correctly on the scales to feed the cows in the barn than they are to see to it that their son or daughter has their personal devotions, or that they see to it that they will help that son or daughter through a spiritual struggle. They are more concerned about the production of that milk cow than they are concerned about the son or daughter embracing the faith.

Where are our priorities? We need to be learning to see well to the household and guard the influences. Who are our young people with? What tapes are they listening to? When God had disappointments in homes, He always come to the father and says, "Adam . . . Eli." He did not come and say, "Eve or sister Eli," but He said "Adam," and "Eli. . . What is wrong?" That is still how God does.

Some will contend that they will lose their children by holding a Scriptural position. I can tell you on the basis of Scripture, you will lose them if you do not. "You cannot make your dresses that way." Do you ever say that father? You must. "Young man you must get hair cut now. It is too long. It is too bushy. You will not comb it that way. You simply will not do it." "Yes, I know you had good intentions when you bought that piece of

dress material but it will need to go back. It simply must go back."

Did you ever do that fathers? With mothers, daughters, and sons that are loyal and obedient there still will be times when that kind of direction needs to be given. Therefore, you say, "No, I do not need to do it that way. I do not ever need to do that because everything kind of coasts along." Well, it is probably because you are not quite alert to what is happening. I do not think we find it quite that way.

"We simply will not do it that way." I know one young man where we needed to talk to his father about the way the young man was combing his hair. The father said, "What can I do about it? I can't simply take a hold of him and comb his hair." One father that was standing there says, "Oh? I have." One can do it in a form, "Listen to me. I am boss." We recognize that, but listen we need to be fathers and mothers that take those kind of positions born out of a passion for the eternal consequences. When that is the reality and that is the feel then I believe sons and daughters can respond and recognize that it not simply brutality.

20) *I would like to conclude now with the last one, the essential of thriving spirituality verses*

30 and 31. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." Marriage dare not be based on the excitement we share but on deeper spiritual qualities. Keep the family altar regularly. Fit our material pursuits, our personal interests, and our social interests around church interests, and not church interests around our interests. Cultivate, by the grace of God, the spiritual virtues. Have a reverence and a regard for truth. Yes, have that which will finally be what we call our families to, a woman that feareth the Lord.

I am always sobered when we are at weddings and we are here thinking of it in that direction. The wedding day comes. It is recorded in the family books. We all go home. It was simply another wedding. Did you ever take a family book and look at it? We have a number of family books. We have one where we can trace my Martin line clear back to the ones that came from

Europe. As I traced that I do not know the people. As one comes closer to the present I do, but you trace it. You come down and you see that here they are faithful, faithful, faithful and all of a sudden something happened in this one home. Something happened and then it is scattered.

We are not sure what happened. Was it a father who became disenchanted with the church, is that what happened? What happened? Was material all consuming? Is that what happened? Over here is another one. The line keeps running right on through, but over here is one that breaks off again. Or, here you look at a home and all the children came to the faith but here is one that did not? You know what happened? Brother and sister your marriage date will be in the family records now. It will be part of the future books, but let us by God's grace and loyalty to truth make it so that the line of faith will run onto the end. May the Lord help us.

## **The Sunday School: Why We Produce Sunday School Materials**

It is a blessing to have sound Sunday School material and to have it available to us always in good time. You might say that the beginning work in planning is

by one-and-a-half years ahead of publication. It starts quite early. There are a number of meetings and number of people involved in organizing it and selecting the

text and finally writing, editing and move then moving it onto printing. This arrangement at this point has proven satisfactory. We could ask the question, "Will we ever produce or print our own material?" I am not here to answer that question. I think presently the arrangement is satisfactory. We would not want to rule out that possibility in the future years. We do not need to discuss that point today.

We want to look at the subject primarily in three areas. I) The background of Mennonite Sunday School literature production. II) The rise of the Conservative efforts in publishing this material. Then III) A few practical thoughts at the end. I) It would not be fair to look at this subject only from where we stand today but there is about a one hundred year background related to the publishing of Mennonite Sunday School material. We might say that we stand in that flow of time. Today, what we have is not what we have borne or produced but it is something that we are building on from the past. It is important always to view the present in light of the past and the future, so that we can know where we have come from and which way and where we are moving.

The Sunday School movement

began in the Mennonite Church in the late 1800's. At first there was quite a bit of opposition to the Sunday School work. In reading I discovered that much of the concern was related to the literature. In the beginning of the movement there was no Mennonite literature produced. Therefore, it was bought or acquired from Protestant organizations such as the *American Sunday School Union* and the *American Tract Society*. The early Mennonite Sunday Schools used this literature which we call denomination or interdenominational material. Of course, this literature was weak on Bible doctrines, and especially on the doctrines that the Mennonites held precious.

In about 1880 there was a letter sent to John F. Funk who was editor of the *Herald of Truth*. Thirty-seven reasons were given to him why the Mennonite church should not have Sunday Schools. As I read these, I think that many of them were legitimate reasons. However, what we know today as the Sunday School has basically overcome these objections. And one of these was related to the curriculum. Notice as I read, "We object to [Sunday School] because it is represented as teaching our youth the sacred Scriptures only, while

there is a mixture of other books used along with them, made up of select matter from the Word of God in part, and partly as tales by societies not opposed to war, bloodshed or imposing cost and inconvenience by suing at law.” [*The Mennonite Church in America* p. 158]. Therefore, the brethren involved in that and related to that did have a legitimate reason.

This background is what gave rise to the publishing of Mennonite Sunday School literature. In 1873 John Funk for one year published a supplement to the *Herald of Truth* that he issued on a weekly, or perhaps on a monthly basis this supplement. However, due to opposition, it only lasted one year. There was a lot of opposition to the Sunday School and he discontinued this. I discovered that the Lancaster Conference was instrumental in spearheading the publishing of Sunday School materials. In 1880 the Lancaster Conference bishops authorized a committee to prepare a series of Sunday School books. This was only two books on the children’s level. The committee was Amos Herr, Jacob Brubaker, then bishops Isaac Eby and Benjamin Herr along with John F. Funk from the Elkhart publishing interests. The levels they published were pri-

mary and intermediate and they called these *Lesson Question Books*.

In 1883, I believe is when these were published and they were used up until 1890 in a continuous way. In 1890 John Funk began to publish his materials and series again in the *Herald of Truth*. It was interesting again, in M. G. Weaver’s book there is some interesting accounts given about this effort. I thought it was especially interesting to us in our day when we think the labour and effort that is involved in the publishing of material, and that is writing, editing and so on, we tend to get weary. This is the testimony of Bishop Jacob Brubaker. It is found on page 290 in the M. G. Weaver book *Mennonites of Lancaster Conference*. He calls to memory that he and bishop Funk had urgent duties at their respective homes, he on his farms and Funk in his printing work. As they met ten days to prepare these books, ten whole days, and several times during the week, they were on the point of discontinuing the work and returning to their homes. Every time brother Herr (that would be Amos Herr) “with tears streaming down his cheeks would lure them back to the work with renewed zeal and vigour as he had argued and preached to

them challenging them with his often repeated statement during the meeting.” And this was a statement, ““Brethren think of it, your work at home relates to and concerns this worlds goods only. But the work in which we are labouring is for unborn and future boys and girls as well as for the present generation. It is for the Church, for time and for eternity. The Sunday School and its work properly carried out is the only salvation of the church. You must, and I know that you will remain to finish this trust whereunto we are appointed.’ Accordingly the committee finished two of the grades of lessons and adjourned their work after ten days only to return a short time later for some more work.” Thus, production Sunday School materials always did require work.

The point is that there was a vision in mind here because the Sunday Schools were coming in and there was no Anabaptist oriented literature available. The Mennonite churches spearheaded here by the Lancaster Conference, produced something that was satisfactory for the church. I think that is the vision and the burden for which we work today. We believe that it is for this generation and it will have its results and repercussions

in the future. May we learn from that example and the hard work of those people.

In 1890, Funk began to publish his Sunday School series again. We will remember that the Funk effort was a private organization, although it served the church at large. In 1908, the Mennonite Publishing House was begun at Scottdale. This was a church owned or a church organization. From the beginning Scottdale concentrated a full line of Sunday School materials. This flow continued, we might say, as a standard supply for the Old Mennonite Church up until 1960.

How many in this audience remember using or having used the Herald Sunday School materials? Let us see a raise of hands. Well, it is less than fifty percent, because that takes us primarily back before the year of 1968, when our churches began. We would say that in those earlier years, Scottdale was primarily producing good material. The flow of their material and the flavour of it, which is always true in literature production, reflected the spiritual level of the church. As long as the church was right, and moving the right direction, the church was right too. We should note that Lancaster Conference had no official involvement in Scottdale.

However, they did have some representation on the publishing board and work. It seemed like the conferences (that is true of not only Lancaster but most of the conferences) were satisfied in general to have others produce their literature.

It finally came to the place where they felt incapable of producing the literature. Finally, this trust in Scottdale, or in a far away publishing house, was related to the apostasy of the Lancaster Conference because when the Western conferences, including the involvement of Scottdale were beginning to apostasize the material moved right with it. In my day, I remember this Sunday School material coming into the church where I was a part of. The literature was beginning to reflect and promote the decline.

This decline was observed and lamented by many concerned people. However, very little was done or very little could be done within that organizational structure to arrest this course. I remember in the early 60's, the Revised Standard Version was an issue in Sunday School materials. Scottdale began to produce that and to promote it. There were cries of concern from the Eastern Conferences and then they began to produce both the

King James Version and the Revised Standard Version. In applications there were things coming in that were not clear on doctrinal issues such as nonresistance, divorce and remarriage, the Christian woman's veiling, and holidays such as Christmas and so on. I remember sitting in classes where those things were not believed but it was in the books. We can readily see how that helped to promote a decline even among the concerned churches.

This is the background of what led to what we call the conservative publishing interests of our day. The lesson here in this part is this: literature is a powerful course in directing the course of a people, either for good or for evil. As we look in history, the Sunday School materials and the *Gospel Herald* were the leading forces of influence in literature among the Mennonite churches. We should remember that our Sunday School books, our doctrinal papers, and our children's papers are helping to lead the church one direction or another.

This is really the main reason why we are involved in producing Sunday School literature and other literature that comes into our homes. We see it as essential in directing the interests and protecting the material that comes

into our homes. We know, learning from history, that it is a very powerful force. As we leave this part, and I want to again give credit to the Old Mennonite church as it worked through Scottdale for many years in supplying the church with a steady flow of material. I believe that today, our church and a number of individuals have benefited and are benefiting from that literature even today. We want to thank the Lord for that.

II) *The rise of the conservative Mennonite publishing efforts, especially now as it is related to the subject of Sunday School materials.* Although it cannot be separated from the whole because the rise of the interests was related primarily or initially to the Sunday School curriculum needs. As I mentioned, the apostasy within the Old Mennonite church was mushrooming in the 50's and the 60's. The aftermath, we might say of the World War II days and the amalgamation of those programs. Across various Conferences, there were concerned brethren who were not ready to move with the trends. These brethren recognized literature as one of the tools of the enemy, and especially the Sunday School materials were singled out as the primary concern. It soon became evident that

this was not an apostasy by default but rather a planned apostasy, which was initiated through the literature and missions and educational agencies of the church.

Where it touched us, especially was through the literature end and the missions, not as much through education at that point. It soon became evident that there was no change forthcoming. We are glad for the vision of this early concern, and these brethren of these early years. In October 18, 1958, a group of thirty-five brethren met at Amelia, Virginia met to discuss a possibility of beginning a new publishing work. Later in this year, in 1958, a seven-member board was established with the commission to publish Scriptural literature from a Conservative Mennonite viewpoint. The beginning project, as I understand it, was Sunday School materials. In the beginning, it was undated material. In 1960 this work was established (or rather moved) to Crockett, KY and soon became known as Rod and Staff Publishers. I think that name was given in 1960.

Now, remembering that the first project was Sunday School materials helps us to see that it was the pressing concern of that day. I think as the brethren

moved into that work, the other interests and concerns became evident, for instance, the school materials. That was not a leading and initial concern among the conservative publishers. That came a bit later. We want to thank the Lord for that. Nevertheless, the concern for Sunday School materials was the major and leading concern. Since that time, the curriculum has been upgraded quite a bit and organized.

I mentioned at first there was a three year undated curriculum produced from 1962–1965 [which was topical in nature], until recently those books were still available through Rod and Staff for personal Bible Study. Presently the Rod and Staff curriculum is a twenty-eight-year study plan with the major studies being covered every seven years. It is a seven-year cycle and the total master plan is a twenty-eight-year plan. The goal is that within seven years most of the books of the Bible are covered and within the twenty-eight-year plan all of the books of the Bible are covered in one way or the other. We will comment on that a bit later. That we believe is a very good plan of Bible study.

Now, the question could, and I am sure is being raised here in some people's minds, "How did

the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church become related to the Rod and Staff work?" The answer is this: it is another chapter in this story. The Eastern Pennsylvania Church began in 1968 and the brethren involved in this movement had identified with the non-Conference movement. I doubt whether any of the later Eastern brethren were involved in the Amelia meeting. I am not sure of that. I do not think so. That is what we call the initial interest and the non-Conference movement which we give credit to their initial vision and concern.

However, the Eastern development was not a part of the non-Conference development. The reason for that is basically this that the initiators of the Eastern church or those who were in the beginning years, had an appreciation for Conference type of church government which the non-Conference movement had a different view on that.

However, the concerns of these two movements were very similar. The answers were not always the same but they were very similar. From the beginning, our church group was a promoter of Rod and Staff literature and we can see why, because to us it was an answer to the apostasy in literature within the Mennonite

church. Thus, very early in the formative years of our church group which would be beginning in 1968, some of our brethren were asked to serve as writers and editors in the Sunday School work which our brethren readily accepted those assignments. From that point, our involvement has been steady and increasing. Today the production end of the entire Sunday School curriculum is primarily with our group as I mentioned. There is the managing of outlines, and writing and editing. This is not something we have taken from Rod and Staff. It is something they have asked us to do and have invited our involvement in it.

Our involvement was not by default. Let us remember this. From the beginning of our church group there was concern that the fate of our literature needs will not be left to another group. Therefore, our involvement was to help protect our interests and to protect the literature that is coming into our church group. We believe that is a very important principle. Perhaps we have learned as we have that thought of history and the attachment that the Mennonite church had in the past and the lack of control over their literature. That is basically the story. More could be said of that.

III) I want to give a few points here now in closing on what I would call the value of this work or the challenge that it presents to our group. I want to say this first. One reason for this discussion today is to lay the burden of this work on the church. As we think again on past years, our mentality was that this work is produced at some far away place by professional people. However, the literature needs of our church are met from within and Lord touches people here and there, people that did not consider themselves writers as such, but give it a try and are trained into the work. Then the Lord blesses it. We believe this is the Biblical and, we might say, conservative approach to publishing literature. I am very concerned that the church stays alert and stays abreast with these developments so that we can pray for the work and it does not become a specialized, exclusive, or a professional work that eventually is separated from the common people and we might call it, from the grassroots support levels. So we are very glad to give some of this information to stir up some interest and support for the work.

A few things here in summary. Why do we produce this literature? What are the values? 1) It resolves the problem surrounding

the use of the uniform International Sunday School Lessons text. How many of you know what that means? It is something in the past that was a very controversial issue. If I understand it right, the uniform International Sunday School lesson text is supplied by the National Council of Churches, which if I am right, those must be paid for. Royalties must be paid to receive those. They outline the Sunday School text for the year, the subjects, and then sell them to various denominations and then the denominational publishing houses do the writing. The purpose for this from their perspective is to produce a uniformity through the denominations. As you go travelling here and there, any place we might say, in the U.S. or perhaps in North America, and other English speaking countries you will be studying the same text.

Now, that would sound attractive in a sense. Herald Press was under the International Series and this was sold to the Sword and Trumpet and then to Christian Light Publications (CLP). From the beginning, and I remember this discussion, there was concern among the conservative element that this presents a technical (what we call an ecumenical link to the larger

Protestant denominations) especially as it falls under the National Council of Churches. For this reason initially, Rod and Staff produced their own curriculum, a seven-year/twenty-eight year master plan. One value of this is that it establishes a line of separation on the ecumenical question. In a practical way, the uniform lesson helps produced by other denominations are not very useful to our people.

I am not sure what would happen for instance if our teachers, could go to the bookstore and buy 'x' amount of commentaries that are written related to this particular Sunday School lesson this morning. I think that would provide a Protestant flavour and influence that I am not sure we could handle. Therefore, the Rod and Staff and our approach in this is that we avoid the International Sunday School Lesson Series plan and see that as a line of separation that keeps us a step further away from the ecumenical involvement with the broader Protestant body. I think most of us have commentaries of one kind or another and we believe there is a place for that. However, when you throw a commentary into the hands of the church at large, from a Protestant perspective on this particular lesson that certainly does provide

some dangers.

This plan, or our involvement and the way we do it, does resolve that problem of the use of the Uniform International Sunday School Lessons. Also, with this twenty-eight-year plan, rather than the International text, it provides a comprehensive study of the Bible. I mentioned before that the goal and the pattern is that we study the entire Bible. We include passages that Protestants in general would avoid. Can you imagine the Protestants concentrating on 1 Corinthians 11 for instance? Or, nonresistance? Perhaps if they would, it would be in a very limited and watered down approach. I am grateful that our plan and our curriculum covers the Bible. We trust it is a good emphasis and a good education in the proper way of studying the Bible. Also, for many Sunday School material publishers much of the writing for Sunday School material is done by individuals. We have chosen rather a committee approach.

2) This pattern provides an opportunity for continued current applications to Bible principles. That is, applications to our particular denominational needs, and applications to our Anabaptist frame of reference and understanding. It is very

important that we study and apply the Bible within the context of what we are facing. It is not so much, or only what the world is facing out there but what we are facing. Our approach, written by our people, understanding our issues, we might say, from the “inside out,” helps to give direction to that and gives teaching to that on very important subjects. You could study that Scripture and make various applications. Our goal is to apply it to our needs, where we are today.

That brings up this question, “Since some of these books are studied every seven years, why not simply restudy them, and get the old books out?” In fact there was some interest in that over the years. Some felt we ought to simply “freeze,” the curriculum. That is what we call it, or simply reuse it. It was good now. It will be good in seven years. Well, that is true, but the argument against that is that the applications must be current and every generation and every cycle certainly something new is on the horizon. Our goal is to speak to the issues that are with us today. It brings the opportunity of speaking to new issues and challenges which must be addressed. As I was thinking of this and looking through our books, per-

haps we are a little weak on this.

If you look and think back over in past years when the churches were coming out, the revival groups, the applications were more slanted to the needs within, and perhaps some of the evils of the Mennonite church settings at large. Well, that battle front has changed somewhat. We know that and our needs and conflicts now are more related to those that we face from within. You trace that in the books. It is there. It will be a little tripe and a little antiquated to go back to a twenty-five-year old book and restudy all those things and applications of what the church was experiencing twenty-five or more years ago.

It is not that the principles are different. Rather, the issues and the applications are a little different. That is why we keep producing literature. We do not simply stop and say "That is good enough." We study a book like Judges or one of the Gospels seven years ago, and when we study the again in this seven years, we study it again and rewrite it and reapply it. We believe that is one of the reasons for Sunday School. It is not only to study the Scriptures, but also to apply the Scriptures, and apply them in a Biblical context. The Sunday School curriculum pro-

vides that opportunity.

3) The efforts in production require commitment and sacrifice which are a needed discipline to our church groups. It is not good to have things handed to us as we say, on a silver platter. Rather, the stress, the toil, the cost, and the effort — all those things — God turns into a blessing for us. As I think of the many, many people that are involved in various ways, in the producing of the literature, it has been a blessing to them, but above that it has been a blessing to the Church. We want to keep doing this even for that reason. The strenuous hours spent in production bring a refining influence into our group.

4) Being involved in producing literature builds a control into the literature flow into our group that is needed. We believe that the literature helps to direct the group. It also reflects what we are thinking and what we are. It is very important to guard the literature and especially now the Sunday School literature. It is very important to keep it safe and Biblical. We want the Lord to bless it. We want the interest of the congregations, and the people in this. We want the burden of this to rest upon the Church.

As we study history, and as people will study our history

some time if time tarries, they can learn valuable lessons from our procedures. Perhaps they will learn some things that we do not think about today, in the negative sense. We do not have all the answers. We know this, but God has been blessing the work.

We thank the Lord for the Conservative Mennonite interest and the Lord has provided publishers, We do not want to see that as a routine blessing, but a special blessing that we implore the Lord's grace and goodness to continue.

### Scripture References

	<b>Genesis</b>	31:11	223	31:21, 22	229
18:19	217	31:12	223	31:21, 22	229
		31:13	224	31:23	229
	<b>Proverbs</b>	31:14, 15	224	31:24	229
31:1-31	219	31:16	225	31:25	229
31:1, 2	219	31:17	226	31:26	230
31:3	221	31:18	227	31:27, 28	230
31:4	221	31:19, 20	227	31:30, 31	232
31:10	219, 222				

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#### Preparing Our Children to Contribute to Publication Needs

From a message by Stanley Wine

Friday, October 28, 1994

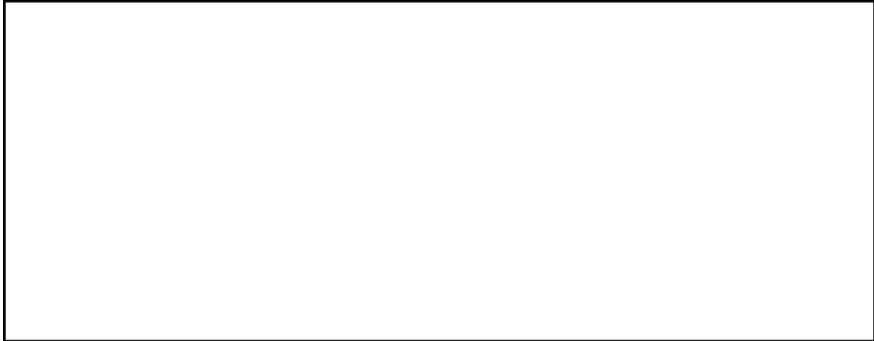
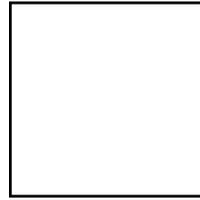
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