

DOCTRINAL ESSAY DELIVERED AT THE 57th ANNUAL CONVENTION

by

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The Importance of Choosing and Having a Truly Christian Spouse

“The world is very evil, the times are waxing late! Be sober and keep vigil; the Judge is at the gate!” (TLH 605, 1). Thus we sing with the hymnwriter in our divine services. The truth of these words is as Scriptural as can be. The Lord Jesus tells us concerning these last evil days that they shall be as the days of Sodom; that there will be general lawlessness; that children will be disobedient to their parents; that many false prophets shall appear and shall deceive many. The last times will be so trying that if He did not shorten the days, not even the very elect would be saved. And as we look about us, what do we observe? The morals just within our own country have sunk to lower levels than they ever have been. Pornography meets the eye not only in movie theaters but even within the living rooms of our homes on television screens and computers; marriages are dissolved at a moment's notice; perversion, so-called “civil partnerships” between two males or two females, are the order of the day. All attempts on the part of those who still have some civil righteousness left in them to curb such things are met with stinging ridicule and vociferous opposition. In many work-places, those employees who raise their voices against such rottenness are told that they must attend what are often referred to as “sensitivity classes” if they want to hold on to their jobs.

The situation within visible Christendom is not much better. One would at least expect a different attitude on the part of those who call themselves Lutherans. Would to God that were true! But unfortunately the devil has taken captive even many of them. This last spring, for example, we read about a lesbian couple, one of whom was the pastor of an ELCA congregation, who had a baby; and the woman was still able to retain her pastorate with the approval of her bishop. Of course, it is a well-known fact that the ELCA openly tolerates such perversion not only among its members but even among its pastors.

All this should be obvious to any wide-awake Christian, unless he or she has been lulled to sleep by the *father of lies* (John 8:44). These are indeed very evil days; and, were it not for the promises which our Savior, the Head of the Church, has graciously given to us, what a tragedy these days would bode also for us. After all, although we are Christians, nevertheless, we still have our sinful flesh; and we must confess with the Apostle Paul: “*I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; ...the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not that I do; ...O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Romans 7:18, 19, 24). How careful we must therefore be in our thinking and in our everyday walk of life lest we fall into that fast-moving current of sinful worldliness to be cast over the waterfall into the everlasting abyss of hell!

Lest we yield to discouragement, however, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, assures us: “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life. And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand*” (John 10:27–28). But remember that it is incumbent upon us that we accept, believe, and follow His Word if we, by His grace, are going to live spiritually through these last evil days which the Bible depicts to us. And this means that every aspect of our lives should conform to His Word! This also applies to all our relationships with one another, particularly in the case of selecting a spouse and entering into marriage.

I.

It is well-advised that those Christian couples contemplating marriage be well-versed in the Word of God as to the duties and responsibilities of spouses. Let us see what the duties are, first of all, for a **husband**. God's Word tells us that the husband is to love his wife. The Apostle Paul writes: “*Husbands, love your wives; and be not bitter against them*”

(Colossians 3:19). And in his epistle to the Ephesians, this same apostle reminds the husband that he is to love his wife, even as Christ loved the Church: *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself”* (5:25–28). The Christian husband who thus loves his wife, even as Christ loved the Church, will strive to be careful in his relationship with his wife and not allow any bitterness to creep in to spoil that relationship.

In this connection it is good to remember that the Christian husband dare not forget that the love for his wife is never to supersede the fear of God. It often happens that a marriage proves to be a hindrance to true piety and godliness. Such is the case as depicted to us in the example which the Savior gives in Luke 14:20. When the invitation to the Great Supper was extended to him, the husband offered the excuse: *“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”* No wonder we read that the Apostle Paul warns: *“But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that...they that have wives be as though they had none”* (I Corinthians 7:29). While the husband is to love his wife, under no circumstances dare he place her before the Lord Jesus and His Word. The words of the Savior apply also to this relationship: *“He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:37).

While the Scriptures teach that the husband is the head of the wife, he is not to treat her as a slave. The Christian husband is not to be a tyrant; nor is he to be harsh, cruel, or rude to his wife. He is to honor his wife as his God-given helpmeet. The Lord says through the Apostle Peter: *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered”* (I Peter 3:7). The husband is to take into consideration the weakness of his wife. Remember how kindly Elkanah, the husband of Hannah, dealt with her when she was so sorely grieved because the Lord had not blessed her with children! (I Samuel 1:8).

It is the sacred duty of a husband to provide for his wife and children. Not that he must provide innumerable, unnecessary luxuries, but that the wife and children have sufficient for their daily needs. Whoever is able to do that and does it not, but spends his money on his own selfish ends, personal whims and desires, or is unwilling or too lazy to support his wife and family, has no right to call himself a Christian. The Apostle Paul minces no words in declaring: *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel”* (I Timothy 5:8).

It is but natural to assume that a marriage will be blessed with children. The words of the Psalmist are crystal-clear when he states that *“children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward”* (Psalm 127:3). And it is good for a woman to consider from the speech of her intended husband what his attitude is toward having children and rearing them. The Apostle Paul writes: *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). A similar statement is found in Colossians: *“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged”* (3:21). These particular passages are often used by mawkish sentimentalists who say that it is not right to punish children, especially by spanking them. The Holy Scriptures teach that it is the duty of the father to punish his children when they are disobedient. When we examine the Scriptures, we find many passages which support the old adage, *“Spare the rod and spoil the child.”* It is God the Holy Spirit who declares through the pen of the wise man: *“He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. ...The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. ...Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul”* (Proverbs 13:24; 29:15,17). Hence when the words of Scripture are set aside and replaced by the so-called wisdom of the modern psychologists and educators who would have us to believe that these words of Scripture are not applicable in

our present enlightened age, it does not take much investigation to observe the consequences of their so-called “superior” wisdom. In the homes, in the schools, in public decorum generally, we sadly see all manner of impudence, back-talk, and disobedience being openly tolerated. I am reminded of the words of J. Edgar Hoover, who used to be the head of our F. B. I. His words bear repeating today. “Frankly,” he said, “I become irritated when I hear doting mothers and fathers say, ‘I love Junior so much that I just can’t bring myself to punish him.’” In reality, these parents do not love their children. It is a strange kind of love indeed which turns a normal infant into a maladjusted child! Pampering, overprotection, making excuses and cooing soft words when a firm hand across the seat of the trousers would be more appropriate are practices which create contempt for authority and obstruct decency among youth.”

On the other hand, however, a Christian woman intending marriage should observe whether her intended spouse has a terrible, seemingly uncontrollable temper and then take into consideration the consequences for herself and their eventual children. While the Scriptures do not forbid *appropriate* and *proper* disciplinary measures against children for their disobedience, it certainly does forbid *excessive* and *unnecessary* punishment. For such only succeeds in embittering the child and thus provoking him to anger and to wrath (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). The Bible furnishes us with numerous examples of those who provoked their children to wrath. Consider merely one: Saul, the first king of Israel, after his departure from the ways of the Lord, provoked his son, Jonathan, to wrath. We recall that Saul had become exceedingly jealous of David, Jonathan’s friend. So great was Saul’s jealousy that he sought on different occasions to slay David. He even attempted to make use of his son, Jonathan, in an effort to have David slain; but Jonathan remained true to his friend, David, and faithful to the Word of God. Saul had commanded Jonathan: “‘*Wherefore now send and fetch him [David] unto me, for he shall surely die.*’ And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, ‘*Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done?*’ And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him; whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and did eat no meat the second day of the month; for he was grieved for David because his father had done him shame” (I Samuel 20:31-34).

How many fathers today provoke their children to wrath! They do this when they lead a sinful and an ungodly life and thereby leave a wicked example for their children to follow. How many fathers thus teach their children to curse, to lie, and to cheat by their wicked examples! It is but natural that a child looks to his father and feels that whatever the father does must be proper, regardless of whether it be contrary to Scripture or not. By such wickedness the father is actually placing a stumbling block in the path of his children and causing them to become offended. Very solemnly the Savior warns: “*But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*” (Matthew 18:6). It is indeed a very terrible thing for a father to provoke his children to wrath.

As we have already seen, it is the duty of the father to provide for the welfare of the family. While many fathers fulfill the obligation to provide for the *physical* welfare of their children, they fail most miserably in the most important duty which God has laid upon them – bringing up their children “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” The *spiritual* welfare of the children is laid principally upon the father as the head of the house. And there are numerous passages which remind us of this (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; etc.). Many fathers are of the mistaken opinion that the church, Sunday School, and Bible class are merely for women and children. The mother, therefore, should see to it that the children attend Sunday School and perhaps church services, while the father does something else on Sunday mornings. It is the Scriptural duty of the father not only to *take* his children, but also to *go with* them! Where, of course, the father refuses to assume this God-given duty, then the mother must see to it that the children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are, after all, *her* children too, entrusted to her by God Himself.

Our essay, however, is concerned with the *Christian* father. Being such, he will recognize

his Scriptural obligations to his children. In accord with the Savior's demand to baptize all nations (Matthew 28:19), for example, a faithful Christian father will bring his children to the Lord Jesus in Holy Baptism, which, as the Apostle Paul declares, is "*the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*" (Titus 3:5). Yet, the duty of the father does not end there. The father is to bring up his children in the pure teachings of God's holy Word (Ephesians 6:4) — by means of *private* instruction, first of all, in the *home* (Deuteronomy 6:6-7), and for *public* instruction only where the Word is proclaimed and taught in all of its truth and purity (Hebrews 10:25; II Timothy 4:2). Moreover, the father should also constantly admonish, warn, and exhort his children with the Word of God to enter in at the strait gate, "*because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it*" (Matthew 7:14). He should also remember them in his prayers, asking that God would, by means of His precious Word and the Holy Sacraments, keep and preserve them in the one true faith unto their end (Romans 1:16; I Peter 1:5; Revelation 2:10b).

What an unmerited gift when children are blessed with a truly Christian father who strives to carry out his Scriptural obligations with diligence! Solomon had such a father in David. We hear Solomon declare: "*Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father; and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also and said unto me, 'Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live'*" (Proverbs 4:1ff.).

II.

Now then, in this second part let us turn to what the Word of the Lord tells us are the Scriptural duties and responsibilities of the Christian *woman, wife and mother*.

Women have always been considered inferior to men by heathen religions. The early Babylonians required every woman to submit to their idol, Ishtar, for immoral purposes. And, among the early Greeks and Romans, women were practically placed in the same class as slaves. The Hindus do not allow women to read the *Vedas*, the sacred writings of their religion, nor are they permitted even to eat at the same table with their husbands. The Mohammedans have always restricted the education of the women; and it has been only in recent years that these restrictions have been somewhat lessened in some Muslim countries. In a similar manner the Buddhists teach that a wise man should avoid married life, as if it were a pit of burning coals. It also teaches that there are eighteen special hells for its Buddhist women. Confucianism considers women a necessary evil and, at one time, even allowed the mothers to kill their baby girls. While the heathen religions degrade their women, it is the Christian religion which gives women their rightful place in the world.

It is the clear teaching of Holy Writ that the blessings of Christ's glorious work of redemption extend over women as well as men. Even as all men and women lay under the curse of the law, "*for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23), so also God has freely forgiven the sins of all men and women "*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (v. 24). "*God was in Christ, reconciling **the world** unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19). And as far as salvation is concerned, there is no difference in the sight of God between the male and the female. Christian women, as well as Christian men, enjoy as their very own possessions, by faith in their Savior and His merits alone, the forgiveness of all their sins, peace of heart and of conscience, the indwelling of God the Holy Ghost, and the hope of everlasting life with Jesus in the joys of heaven. By the pen of the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit declares: "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26-28). And the Apostle Peter speaks of Christian husbands and wives as "*being heirs together of the grace of life*" (I Peter 3:7).

While the Scriptures very plainly teach that men and women are equals as far as the offer of God's grace is concerned and His earnest desire that all be saved, nevertheless, they, at the

same time, teach that women must respect the subordinate relationship which God Himself has established for them, both within Holy Marriage and *within the church* or local congregation: Women are not to exercise dominion over the men. Let us look at the passages in Scripture which speak of this relationship: *“Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the Law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church”* (I Corinthians 14:34–35). *“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”* (I Timothy 2:11–12). From these passages it is clearly evident that women must be excluded from the Office of the Public Ministry, not because they are inferior in knowledge and understanding (which they are not), but because of the relationship which God Himself has established. Therefore, it is also on the basis of Scripture that our congregations permit only the men of the congregation to speak and to vote in congregational meetings, to teach classes in which men are students, and to hold offices of authority over the men.

We are fully aware of the fact that we are belittled and ridiculed because of this Scriptural position. But this is to be expected in these last days of the world which the Bible compares to the days of Sodom. We are told that Paul’s words are no longer binding upon us, because times have changed. False prophets and their adherents say that Paul was merely reflecting the social conditions which prevailed at that time. Such unscriptural opinions have literally infested the vast majority of Protestant denominations, including many bearing the name Lutheran. The so-called Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (E. L. C. A.) reveals its utter disregard for this portion of the Word of God by having more and more women serving as pastors of congregations and by tolerating manifest homosexuals as incumbents of the Pastoral Office.

While the Word of God forbids women to teach in the public assemblies of the congregation, by no means does it thereby excuse women from serving the Lord in His church. The Apostle Peter includes women when he writes, *“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (I Peter 2:9). Not only are women to be conscientious in studying the Scriptures at home, but they should also take an active interest in their church, using the talents which God has entrusted to them in His service. Let no Christian declare: *“There is nothing I can do.”* What about calling upon the unchurched and inviting them to the worship services? What about lending a helping hand to the sick in the congregation? What about visiting some of the elderly who sometimes feel that they are being neglected? What about assisting in cleaning the church building so that the job does not always fall upon a few faithful ladies? And what about teaching the little ones in the Sunday school or in the Christian day school, if there is one? There is always ample opportunity for a faithful Christian woman to serve her Savior and His church.

The fruits of faith of believing women are frequently mentioned in the Bible. In chapter 16 of his Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle mentions a number of Christian women who were working for their Savior. In the beginning of the chapter Paul writes, *“I commend unto you Phebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea, that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles”* (vv.1–4). Greetings to Christian women are extended by the Apostle throughout the chapter. It was this Priscilla and her husband who took the gifted Apollos aside and *“expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”* (Acts 18:26). Turning to the 16th chapter of Acts, we are told concerning Lydia, that she was *“a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us”* (14–15). And what about Dorcas? *“This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds*

which she did.” And when the Apostle Peter was led to the upper chamber to the dead woman, “*all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them*” (Acts 9:36–39). We also note how believing women served the Savior during his public ministry of three years. Luke reports in his Gospel account: “*And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance*” (8:2–3). There is the well-known example of Mary and Martha, in whose home the Savior was frequently a guest (Luke 10:38–42). It was this Mary of Bethany who showed her love for the Savior by anointing His head and feet with a pound of costly spikenard (John 12:1–8). From the Gospels we see that women were among the last persons at the Savior’s crucifixion (Matthew 27:55–56) and the first to see Him alive on Easter morning (Matthew 28:1–10). And finally, it was a woman, a poor widow, who cast into the Lord’s treasury all she had, even all her living (Mark 12:42–44; Luke 21:1–4).

Now what about the position of the Christian wife *in the home*? The creation of the woman and her relationship to man goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After God had formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, “*God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.’ ...And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man made He a woman and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.’ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh*” (Genesis 2:18, 21–24). The believing wife is to be a companion and helper to her husband. Dr. Zorn expresses it quite well when he writes, “*And here God does not mean a help such as an office boy is, but one that gives her heart and her hand to her husband*” (*Questions on Christian Topics*, pp. 159–160). The wife is to relieve her husband’s loneliness by intelligent companionship, by encouraging him in his chosen occupation, and by comforting him in his sorrows. It is self-understood that only where the wife is of one heart and mind in all spiritual matters with her husband can she join with him in his worship of God (I Corinthians 1:10).

The sexual relationship between husband and wife, one of mutual love, fidelity, and intimacy is spoken of in such passages as Genesis 2:24, “*They shall be one flesh.*” And in I Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul shows that this relationship is to serve as an aid against unchastity. “*Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontineny*” (3–5). Such physical relationship will also help keep the wife, and not only the husband, from gross immorality. For note the words of the Apostle immediately preceding the words which I have quoted from First Corinthians: “*To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*” (v. 2).

The wife is also to be subject unto her own husband. In Colossians we read: “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord*” (3:18). And in Ephesians: “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, also let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*” (5:22–24). That is God’s order of creation. “*For Adam was first formed, then Eve*” (I Timothy 2:13). “*Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man*” (I Corinthians 11:9). This subordination from the order of creation remained in effect even after man had fallen into sin. For the Lord said to Eve: “*Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*” (Genesis 3:16). That this order of creation is still binding is also evident from such passages as have been quoted. Dr. Stoeckhardt in his commentary on Ephesians very aptly points out that even as Christ leads and rules His

Church, so also in holy wedlock the husband governs and has the chief responsibility. Therefore it is the duty of the wife to submit to her husband. In view of these passages, no Christian pastor dare eliminate the word “obey” from the marriage ceremony and thereby give the impression that God has abrogated His will for husbands and wives in holy matrimony, OR that in this 20th Century we may choose to abrogate it at *our* will (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

This command is also binding upon the Christian wife whose husband is a rank unbeliever. She should cheerfully walk in the ways of the Lord and pray earnestly for her husband’s conversion. In First Corinthians the Apostle Paul refers to this very thing when he writes, *“And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”* (7:13–14). And the Apostle Peter writes, *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [manner of life] of the wives, while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear”* (I Peter 3:1–2). When, however, the husband demands that the wife do something which is contrary to the Word of God, then, of course, she must declare with the Apostle Peter: *“We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Now what do the Scriptures tell us about the Christian woman *as a mother*? It is God’s will that a Christian wife become the mother of children, unless the Lord Himself withholds them. The procreation of children is also one of the three purposes of marriage. The Lord states in the Book of Genesis: *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it’”* (1:27–28). The Lord also spoke these words to Noah after the Flood in which all of the people were destroyed except for Noah and his family of eight souls (Genesis 9:1). Moreover, we see from the Scriptures that children are gracious gifts of God. By the pen of the Psalmist, the Holy Spirit writes: *“Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man ...happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them”* (127:3–5). And in Psalm 128: *“Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways. ...Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house, thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord”* (1-3). Remember the tender reunion between Jacob and his brother? When Esau saw the women and Jacob’s children, he asked: *“Who are these with thee?” And [Jacob] said, ‘The children which God hath graciously given thy servant’”* (Genesis 33:5).

We must remember that a Christian mother’s attitude toward bearing children must always be: What does the Lord say in His Word? And there we note the following principles: **1)** Children are the gracious gifts of God (Psalm 127:3-6; 128); **2)** Children are not to be despised (Matthew 18:10); **3)** God not only grants children, but He also withholds them (Job 1:21; Genesis 20:18; 25:21; 30:2). Keeping these Scriptural principles in mind, the Christian mother will realize that one of the purposes of her marriage is the procreation of children; and therefore she will rejoice with every child that the Lord grants her, whether it be few or many. She will not make the advice and counsel of worldly-minded people her guide but will continually look to the Word of God which is *“a lamp unto [her] feet and a light unto [her] path”* (Psalm 119:105). She will realize that, since it is the Lord who grants her children, it is the Lord who will take care of them by providing them with everything they need to support this body and life. Here, too, the words of the wise man apply: *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding”* (Proverbs 3:5). Thankfulness to the Lord for the children which He has granted her will also prompt the Christian mother to follow the example of Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother of Timothy, who in his early years was trained and nurtured by them in the Word of God, so that the Apostle Paul could later write to him of this and say, *“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”* (II Timothy 3:15). She will assist her husband in bringing the children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by bringing them to Jesus in Holy Baptism, by

teaching them His Word, and by constantly impressing upon their hearts that they are only strangers and pilgrims here and that they should always fix their gaze on the eternal blessedness which awaits them in heaven with Jesus their Savior.

A Christian wife and mother should also give due heed to those warnings in Holy Writ which tell her how not to be. According to her *New Man* of faith, she will listen when her dear Lord tells her not to be contentious, jealous, and quick to become angry. Again the wise man declares by inspiration: *“It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman”* (Proverbs 21:19). She will be careful not to be given over to gossip, like the younger widows concerning whom the Apostle Paul wrote: *“And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not”* (I Timothy 5:13). She will heed the admonition of the Apostle not to be excessively concerned about dress and physical beauty, *“whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price”* (I Peter 3:3–4).

The attributes of a good wife and mother are very fittingly described in the last chapter of Proverbs: *“Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ships: She bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field and buyeth it. With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good; her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen and selleth it and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates”* (31:10-31).

And lest anyone ever think that the New Testament is at variance with the Old Testament on this point, let us note what the Apostle Paul writes to Titus: *“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine ...that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed”* (2:1, 4–5). The Christian wife and mother who thus gives diligent heed to strive after the virtues with which the Scriptures characterize her is truly like the *“wise woman [who] buildeth her house”* (Proverbs 14:1).

We must sadly acknowledge the deplorable fact that the tendency in our day is to take the wife and mother out of the rightful sphere into which God Himself has placed her. On the basis of the passages already quoted, it is certainly obvious that it is not in harmony with the Word of God that a wife and mother neglects her Scriptural duties in the home. The words of the Apostle Paul to his co-laborer Timothy apply: *“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully”* (I Timothy 5:14). And that same Apostle reminds Titus, as we just heard, that the older women are to *“teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own*

husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4–5).

The Bible gives us many examples of God-fearing, pious wives and mothers. We need but think of Abigail, who was faithful to her foolish husband unto the end (I Samuel 25:2–38); of Ruth, the Moabitess, and her tender characteristics (Ruth 1:16ff.); of the Virgin Mary and her humble submission to the Word of God (Luke 1:38); of Lois and Eunice, the mother and grandmother of Timothy (II Timothy 1:5). Such Christian wives and mothers are really a great prize and treasure in our day of gross materialism and ungodly, hedonistic sensuality. And those husbands and children whom the Lord has granted such faithful and pious wives and mothers can never thank and praise God sufficiently for His wonderful grace!

These are the truths of Holy Scripture which are to be taught, known, and emphasized when considering marriage. We are told that statistically two out of three marriages are ending in divorce. The old adage applies so often: “Act in haste and repent in leisure.” Far too many couples are ill-prepared to assume the obligations and responsibilities involved in marriage. Those couples who enter marriage thoughtlessly and without basing their marriage on the solid foundation of God’s Word already have two strikes against them. The third strike inevitably follows. Spiritually-mixed marriages, where one spouse is a true Christian and the other is an unbeliever, or professes a false religion, or is in a heterodox fellowship, is not well-pleasing to the Lord. To establish an “unequal yoke” or connection with the heterodox is a danger to one’s soul and jeopardizes one’s own membership in the household of God (II Corinthians 6:14-18)! Scripture teaches, and experience bears out, that very often the result of such marriages is that the orthodox party falls away from the true religion. Why? Because the Christian spouse entered into a union of *compromise* and permitted the heterodox spouse from the outset to have influence, power, and even authority in the family — influence, power and authority that often exceeds that of the Word of God. We go back into the Old Testament to Genesis chapter 6 where we are told “*that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose*” (v. 2). Reading on we note the consequences of such an arrangement. After Noah had preached for 120 years, only eight individual believers were found on the face of the earth! How can a sincere Christian, who really loves the Lord Jesus and His Word, pray in the Lord Prayer: “*Lead us not into temptation*” and then deliberately expose himself or herself to temptation? Before mutual consent is given to establish the *yoke* or bond of marriage, a prospective spouse from outside the fellowship should be thoroughly instructed in Holy Writ and its precious doctrines to make sure that both individuals are of the same faith so that their marriage may be built upon the solid foundation of the Word of God.

Furthermore, as our Lutheran Catechism correctly states, “Marriage was instituted by God and is entered into by rightful betrothal, or engagement” (*A Short Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism*, CPH, 1943, Question/Answer 61). The children of the world hold that engagement is simply a time in which the man gives the woman an engagement ring and that such an arrangement is a trial period during which time they find out whether or not they are suited for each other. The true Lutheran Church, however, has always held that when two marriageable people solemnly promise one another to be and remain husband and wife according to God’s ordinance, they are, by virtue of their *mutual consent*, already then husband and wife *in the sight of God*. In Matthew, chapter 1, Mary and Joseph are plainly called “*husband*” and “*wife*” (vv. 19–20, 24), although they were “*espoused*” (v. 18), that is, engaged, and had not yet consummated their marriage, as Mary answered the angel when told that she was to be the mother of the promised Messiah: “*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man*” (Luke 1:34)? The wedding service is merely the public declaration of what they have already mutually agreed upon; it publicly confirms the promise already made in the engagement, fulfills the common requirement of the state that marriage must be duly “solemnized,” and gives opportunity to sanctify the marriage with the instruction and application of God’s Word and prayer (I Timothy 4:5). Prior to that public acknowledgment and solemnization, however, the engaged couple should refrain from consummating their marriage, lest grievous offense be given. Therefore it is well-advised to heed the advice of Martin Luther that an engagement should be short lest the couple succumb to the promptings of their flesh.

Permit me to bring this essay to a close with the following prayer adapted from the old Lutheran *Gebets-Schatz* of our orthodox Lutheran fathers, entitled –

PRAYER OF YOUNG PEOPLE FOR A GODLY MATE

O Thou almighty, eternal God, Creator and Preserver of the entire human race, Thou who didst institute the holy estate of matrimony in Paradise and didst honor it through Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, at Cana in Galilee with His first miracle, having permitted me to reach a marriageable age: I earnestly beseech Thee to give me a good, Christian, God-fearing mate, whom I may truly love, and with whom I may live peaceably and harmoniously in true godliness and Christian uprightness here on earth, honorably comport myself to Thy glory, and serve as a good example to others, being useful to ourselves and to all others for the benefit and welfare of body and soul. Thou knowest the hearts, the attitude, and character of all people: From Thee cometh a good spouse, for such is a gift of the Most High. Therefore I cry to Thee for such an one; and I earnestly pray, dear Lord God, that Thou wouldest with Thy Holy Spirit through Thy Word enlighten my heart that I may be able to discern and to make the right choice of a prospective mate, have success in this undertaking if it be Thy will, and confidently commit our life together into Thy fatherly care for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!
