

Christian Family – Part 3 The Family Altar

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Through our Lord Jesus Christ we live in unity with God. We rid ourselves of bitterness, anger, slander so not to grieve the Holy Spirit. God wants to fill us with His love so that we can love one another.

This is all well and fine, but we don't often seem to be taking the apostle's directions. In families children are fighting, arguing over toys, who gets to do this or that. Parents are arguing over money. Things get so bad, even in Christian families, that they are sometimes torn apart. This is not the way it should be.

Parents themselves, husbands and wives, instead of living in peace and love, are centering on the problems, letting animosity build up between them. It is the little things all adding up that never get addressed that wear down a family. So often husbands and wives, instead of coming together in love and mutual submission to one another out of reverence for the Lord Christ, answer each other with that word of indifference, "Whatever."

"Whatever" is a dangerous word to speak, because it means though I do not agree with you, you can go your way and I will go mine and whatever happens to our relationship doesn't matter. "Whatever" means I have lost hope that we can come to an agreement and it doesn't matter to me. "Whatever" is a common word and it is a symptom of the problem that many face today: We aren't grounded in the love of the Lord Christ that brings with it "compassion, love, and faithfulness."

This indifference, if ignored, is what tears families apart. It isn't not only the lack of money, or healthcare problems, or not having enough time that is what is consuming more marriages and families than ever before, but mostly the indifference to one another.

There is an answer to all this indifference today. The answer is a daily walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows the difficulties of life today. He knows what it is like to raise children, for He Himself was a child. He knows the hardships of the family, for His family was poor

The answer to the problems of any family today is in the Bread of Life, as the Lord Jesus said:

✠ "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I give for the life of the world" (John 6:50-51)

We receive the bread of life first of all at the altar of God. At the altar, the Lord Jesus gives us His body and blood, for the forgiveness of sins and as food for our souls. The answer to all our indifference to one another is to come together with the Lord Christ, the living bread from heaven.

The bread of life is not a Sunday only meal. The Lord Jesus Christ would have us feast on it each day of the week wherever there is a Liturgy. We should do the same around our family altar, where we get fed by the Word of God, get ready for that heavenly fodd and forgive one another.

Remember that God is ready to bless us all with peace and love in our homes, but He wants us to know where that blessing comes from. So He calls us all to repent of our indifference to one another, receive His forgiveness earned by His death on the Cross, and celebrate that forgiveness each day around the family altar.

What is the Family Altar?

The family altar is the time and place where we meet the Lord each day by reading His word and bringing our prayers to Him. It is a daily meeting with God, where all the family stops what they are doing and gathers together before their God.

When Noah and his family passed through the flood waters and got out of the ark, the first thing old Noah did was to build an altar and offer a sacrifice to the Lord. His family joined him, wife, three sons and their wives.

When King David sinned against the Lord by counting his soldiers to determine his own strength rather than relying on the promise of God that he would be victorious, he repented and built an altar to the Lord, which later became the holy temple at Jerusalem.

So, think about this family altar as a time out, a rest period where we can finally get down to doing what God put us together as a family to do, to be His people together and communicate with Him. So, what are we supposed to do as a family:

- † Fathers: God expects you to take leadership at the family altar for you are the priest of your own little church.
- † Mothers: You represent the church itself, meaning you have the role of bringing all God's children together, through love and humility.
- † Children: Honor you father and your mother; as God commanded.

In general, parents ought to know that our children will not remember us after we are gone because we were at the office all the time so we could buy them anything. They will only remember us because we showed them love by leading them to imitate God.

How to Build the Family Altar?

Building a family altar does not involve stones and mortar. If that were the case, we would all just build an old fashioned barbecue in the back yard and forget it. The family altar is more permanent and useful than this. It requires your presenece in the body and the spirit.

Sometimes people come to church without the spirit of loving God. They just do it because they have to do it or because they got used to doing it. I just wonder about the message that this sends to the children? How would they learn to worship God, if their role model, is not teaching it the right way? They would feel that Liturgy is too long; hymns are difficult, going early to church is not really that important as going to sports' training or other activities, etc.

Meeting together at the family altar will bring such benefits to your home. It will cause you to get rid of bitterness, anger, and the attitude of "whatever." It will fill your home with love, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. It will teach you to imitate God and live a life of love. Most of all, it will draw you closer to the Lord Jesus, the bread of life.

So don't wait! Like Noah, Moses, David, and a thousand before you, build an altar to the Lord God. Build it together as a family, and let nothing tear it down. And in return you will be filled with the spirit of God, peace, and joy.

How can I build a real family altar? Here are some "suggested" ideas.

1. Carve out sacred time

You may meet at the family altar at any time, morning, evening, at night; at mealtimes or before bed. The important thing is that you make it the most important time of the day. Meeting together with God in your homes is not a burden to an already overloaded family schedule. However, if you start by forcing yourself and learn how to express your love to God, your family will happily follow.

As the Bible taught us in the fourth commandment: "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy", tell yourself that this verse applies your family altar with the following meaning: "remember family night and keep it holy (sacred)". "Holy" or "Sacred" means set apart, dedicated, and devoted to a singular purpose. How can I do that?

- 1) Write it on the calendar and set the date/block the time: permit no other outside activities to interfere; this must be dedicated family time, all family members agree to the expectations.
- 2) Get beyond good intentions: stop talking about doing it, just do it, think of the other things you prioritize in your life, so why not family time?
- 3) Expect challenges to the family altar time: The devil will be working hard to keep you away from this. Stand up to him and protect this time together. We don't forget to feed our children with materialistic food, so how can we not feed them each day with the bread from heaven? Turn off the television and restore the family altar.

2. Create your own family story

- 1) Make memories together of vacations/trips, holiday traditions, family nights, etc.
- 2) Cultivate shared experiences of working together, laughing together, crying together, etc.
- 3) Tell the stories of your history frequently and remember the events, remember the emotions/feelings connected to those events, etc.
- 4) Determine the story your family will write together and let that story be a legacy to future generations, let your family be proud of their story, etc.

Think about the spiritual benefits that these stories will bring to your family. It will make your home a true church that the Lords would love to come to, like the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha at Bethany, which He used to go to find rest. Think about this God loving family:

- 1) Its life is centered around God. If it needs to make a decision, all pray and ask God for guidance, they ask what would God have us do. When they discipline, they do it in a Christian manner. When they instruct, guide, or offer help to children, it is all done with one message in mind: God is first in our home!
- 2) This family worships together, anywhere they go whether at church, at home, in car, or anywhere on earth.
- 3) They read God's Word together to acquaint their children with the Word of God "the Bible", they read it daily and instruct in the ways or things of God.
- 4) They pray together presenting their needs, family needs, others' needs, church needs, even community and world needs, before the Lord.

3. Be a family and not just a physical image

Be an active member of your family's life journey by learning and growing together and sharing mutual love and support together. Attend with all your heart and mind. Look at these beautiful things that you can do when you actively participate:

- 1) Read a good book together: each week a new chapter or a story, and share the reading responsibilities each week. This becomes a material of discussion over a favorite family dinner or snack.
- 2) Watch and discuss a family oriented movie (saints' stories, Bible stories, etc.) and chat with the family of what was the movie about? How was God at work? What can we learn from it as people and as a family?
- 3) Do a service project together and start researching and discovering some local mission or volunteer groups. Schedule a date to work or go serve together; you may go out afterward to discuss over ice cream, coffee, etc.
- 4) Eat together and "commit" to eat at least one meal together daily. A survey by the National Center For Addiction and Substance Abuse showed that teens eating 5 or more meals with family weekly, vs. 2 or less, never tried cigarettes and 50% less likely to try alcohol. Try also Pizza night as we do every Saturday after Tasbeha or other activities like Christmas tree decoration that we did on Friday. Encourage similar activities at home like kid's cook night, coloring contest, etc.

4. Cultivate their spiritual eyes and heart

Finally, help your family to see the world through the lens of faith. Remember what Psalm 128 says:

✠ "1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. 2 When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. 3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants, all around your table. 4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. 5 The Lord bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" (**Psalm 128:1-6**)

- 1) Verse 1: goal of spiritual instruction at home: honor God, walk in obedience to God.
- 2) Verse 2: hard work pays off ("you eat the labor of your hands"): stable kids, equipped for real life

- 3) Verse 3: a productive, fruitful wife: a home she's proud of, a family she loves and children who still come home ("Your children like olive plants, all around your table"), a home they are proud of, a family they love.
- 4) Verse 4 - families whose first priority is God lived blessed lives: these things are the result of a committed life of faith (healthy relationships with spouse, healthy relationships with kids, stable home life)
- 5) Verses 5-6: don't you long for life to look like this family that receives all these blessing from God? Don't you long for the day your family will enjoy each other and get along?

In conclusion, the family altar will and should help you to "alter" your family and make you commit your life and your family to God by putting God first. Invest highly in your family relationships, giving them your best, spending energy, time, and show your emotion to make your family reality.