

Empire Church of the Brethren

## *Sunday Service Sermons*

**21 May 2023**

Friends of the Family

Building on solid ground, ground that never moves, ground that supports.

Text: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

Two houses in Arlington, Texas, that had been built overlooking the Trinity River lost their backyards when after days of heavy rain they began to slide down into the river.

Flooding had occurred in the low areas.

The people who lived on the cliff probably felt secure from the flood, but they had not counted on the silent erosion of their entire backyards.

We can imagine what they must have felt as all the work they had invested in those houses started to slide down into the river.

They were forced to leave their homes in fear that next their back porches and then their entire houses would disappear into the river bottom.

Is your foundation solid?

We are in times that will tell us if our foundation is solid.

Many kinds of enemies, often unseen ones, eat away at the foundations not only of our houses but of our homes.

The financial investment we have in our houses is not all that is threatened; the very survival of our families is vulnerable.

To paraphrase a common Scripture verse, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their family."

Just as surely as there are enemies of the family there are also certain friends of the family.

Jesus not only taught us what to guard against but what to embrace.

He not only taught us what to do, but he helps us see how to do it.

In today's Scripture reading Jesus gave us the clues we need for building healthy families.

God's Word is a friend of the family.

Jesus said that if we hear his words and do them, we will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock.

We almost always interpret this verse as an admonition for personal ethics. But it also applies to building healthy families.

The words of Scripture give us a strong authority base for making decisions in our families.

Some families make decisions about what they will allow their children to do by calling the neighbors to find out what they are going to let their children do.

Many families decide their spending priorities by watching what their neighbors buy.

People who decide what is appropriate and inappropriate simply by taking the popular temperature get into trouble quickly.

They are like the man who built his house on the sand.

Every wind and storm that comes shakes them to their foundation; but those who build their families on the written Word of God have a strong foundation for the building of their lives together.

We have to be cautious, though.

If we build our homes on the Word of God, we must be careful to interpret the Word correctly.

Scripture can be taken out of context and have devastating consequences, for example, it could empower a husband to be a tyrant without reminding him of his responsibility to love his wife as

Christ loved the church, laying down his life for her.

God's Word is not to be used as a hammer to beat other people down but to foster thoughtful concern for one another and sacrificial compassion for each member of the family.

God's Word provides the family with the standard against which to examine issues and to make thoughtful, moral and equitable decisions.

Here are four of Jesus' precepts that apply especially to the family.

Forgiveness.

Jesus said that when we pray we should pray to be forgiven in the same way that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

In *Matthew 18:22* Jesus said that we are to forgive not seven times but seventy times seven.

Nothing is more devastating to a home than old hurts and offenses that have not been forgiven.

If we make forgiveness a priority in our family and forgive even when it isn't easy to forgive, we will be able to withstand the storms.

It is especially important that we forgive our parents for the times they were not able or willing to be the parents we needed them to be.

Many families are still torn apart because of misunderstandings related to wills and inheritances.

The ironic truth is that those who are hurt most by an unforgiving spirit are not those who are unforgiven, but those who will not forgive.

Love

Jesus made it clear that his followers are to love their enemies as well as their friends.

Sadly, we often find it difficult to love even within the family.

Jesus provided us with the direction we need.

The apostle Paul picked up on Christ's strong example of love in *Ephesians 5:25*.

A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.

When Christ lives in us, we begin to discover resources for a love that can give itself away.

And we prayerfully remember how our Lord has loved us, he will create in us the energy to love those around us.

The best definition of this kind of love is found in *1 Corinthians 13*.

Here we discover excellent guidelines for showing love within the family.

Faithfulness.

The fabric of the family is a tightly woven material.

Extramarital affairs introduced into the marriage relationship tear it apart.

Jesus called the Christian family to fidelity and to a love that keeps the eyes focused on each other.

The physical love relationship between the mother and the father is absolutely essential for a healthy family.

Indeed, the best gift a father can give his children is to love their mother.

Supremacy of God.

Because the family is so significant and can bring us so much happiness, we may be inclined to worship our family and elevate it to a place only God ought to have.

*Matthew 10:37-39* reminds us of the absolute primacy of our allegiance to God.

He must come before all other allegiances in life, even before our loyalty to family.

As important as the family is to Christian life, it is not the ultimate for us.

The Church is a friend of the family.

When Jesus described the founding of his church, he spoke of building it on a rock.

As we consider Jesus' parable about the wise builder who built on the rock, we remember that he took his own teaching to heart.

The house he built, the church, is the second great friend to your family.

It is the place where God's Word is taken seriously and authoritatively.

A man who had not been as active as he ought to have been in his church said to his pastor, "This church has been a great gift to my family. Even in those times when I wasn't doing what I should have been doing, the church ministered to my children. The reason my children are what they are today is because of the adult friends and the peers of my children who knew them and cared for them within the life of this congregation. The church has been the most important institution for my

family.”

The church provides needed support through the many relationships it makes possible for its families.

Older families become a model for the younger families.

This witness helps the younger families make decisions and plan how they want to raise their children and build their families.

Older families are helped by their peer families.

Knowing that we are part of the whole body of people who are sharing the same joys and struggling with the same concerns gives us courage to press forward and not give up.

All kinds of families find a place of belonging in the church.

The church is a place of refuge for those who are mentally or physically impaired.

It provides a family for those who have no family of their own.

It also offers a network of support to families broken by death or divorce.

The church stands beside them as the hurts are healed and as God helps them begin again.

Families need friends who have the same goals.

We tend to adopt the standards, goals, attitudes, and ambitions of our friends.

Friends shape our futures.

One of the best gifts a church can give to a young couple is a place where they can meet couples their age and make lasting friendships that will be a bulwark of encouragement and support through the years.

The church helps families learn how to worship together.

As families worship in church Sunday after Sunday, they learn how to praise God and rejoice in his creation outside the church.

Worship becomes a natural part of daily living.

Children who learn how to worship in church and outside in the beauty of God’s world are prepared for a lifelong appreciation of God’s power and majesty.

They become more sensitive to the transcendent dimension that overarches all of life.

The community can be a friend of the family.

Christians should want to support good schools and teachers who care.

A stable community and honest government are the products of people who are willing to get involved.

The libraries, medical resources, marriage enrichment opportunities, and cultural activities in a community are all important to the health of family life in the city.

Christian people are doing God’s work for families when they reinforce positive and healthy attitudes in their local communities.

Healthy families are no accident.

They are built under the authority of God’s Word, in the fellowship of his church, and in a community where people encourage one another in healthy living.

Let’s build our families on the sure foundation, our Lord Jesus “The Christ” the champion of “The Way”.

The way to Life!