

## THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY'S SACRED GOAL

Second in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *A Christian Looks at the World*  
from Ephesians 3:14-19 and 5:1-14

*"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."* Ephesians 5:1

Last Monday Barb and I were eating lunch when we heard the announcement on the radio that Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, had been badly injured in a motorcycle accident in downtown Pittsburgh. Our hearts lurched into our throats! Barb said to me, "If you're any kind of father you'll call your son and tell him." Our son Scott is the most fanatical Steelers fan in our family, if you can believe that. He's an officer in the United States Secret Service and was on duty in the Treasury Building across from the White House. I picked up the phone and punched in his cell phone number.

A few moments before, Scott's radio had crackled to life. "Scott Perrin, report to command headquarters." He said to himself, "I wonder what that's all about. I've not done anything wrong." When he arrived a couple of other officers were in the room and the sergeant commanded, "Sit down." Scott said, "I don't want to sit down. I can handle it." The sergeant said, "You need to sit down." He sat. That was when they told him about Big Ben's accident. Scott noticed the twinkle in their eyes and said he didn't believe them. They'd tried this sort of trick on him before. But that was when his phone began to vibrate. He pulled it out, saw it was me, and said, "Oh no, it's true!" "Any kind of father..." What is it that you do "if you're any kind of father?" And truth—how do you get your children to believe that what you tell them is true? Good questions for a Fathers' Day.

The Christians in Ephesus lived in a thoroughly pagan city. Their culture was pagan. Their traditions were pagan. Their pattern of life had been handed down one generation to the next for nearly three thousand years until the pagan way, with all its immorality and falsehood, was not even questioned. It was just how you did things. But as Paul wrote, large numbers of Ephesians had become Christians, and suddenly the old ways of life were being exchanged for brand new Christian beliefs and practices. How do you live in a new way if you have no background for it? How do you teach your children to live as Christians if you don't have a Christian heritage or godly examples to use as a model? That's a question that confronts many of us today. This morning I want to look at two passages from Paul's letter to the Ephesians in which the apostle provides two practical insights into how we carry out the Christian family's sacred goal. The first passage is Ephesians 3:14-19 where Paul says in effect, **See your family as God's family**. The second passage is chapter 5, verses 1-14, where Paul says, as it were, **Do what you see God do**.

**1. See your family as God's family.** Turn to chapter 3, verses 14-15. *"For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name."* A number of years ago Barb and I visited Abbeville where we'd made reservations to have dinner and then see a play at the Opera House. Abbeville has a very historic house which was the home of General James Perrin. If you've happened to look at the large marble plaque in the South Carolina State House that bears the names of

the men who signed the Articles of Secession that started the Civil War, you may have noted that the first name on the list is that of General James Perrin of Abbeville. Now, I'm not related to General Perrin, at least not in this country. There were three Perrin families who emigrated from France to the American colonies in the late 1600s or early 1700s. One landed in Massachusetts, from which I am descended; one came into Long Island in New York; and the third entered through Charleston. That's where General Perrin's ancestors came from. As we went to pick up our tickets for the play, the lady in the box office became extremely apologetic. They'd tried to locate us, she explained, betraying her anxiety. They'd called all the Perrins in the surrounding cities and towns, but couldn't find us. It seems the previous week's play had been held over and it was being presented that night instead of the one we'd bought tickets for. If we weren't satisfied, they'd be glad to refund our money. It was then I realized that in Abbeville it pays to have the name Perrin. Some distant cousin of mine must have some clout!

A couple of years ago my Swiss friend, Pierre Berthoud, told me that there are many Perrins who live in France along the Swiss border. Maybe I could be important over there, too! But I'm not sure I want a French connection. The three branches of the Perrin family who came to America so long ago left France because they were French Huguenots, Christians of Presbyterian persuasion, who'd been persecuted and driven out of the country. They arrived here a generation later as refugees. Those who stayed behind, like most of the French, have probably ceased to be Christians, if they ever were.

Now, notice verse 15. Paul says that "*every family in heaven and on earth derives its name*" from the Father. What does he mean by that? It's not that all human families descended from Noah's three sons, each of whom held a clear knowledge of God. Nor is it that in the first half of Ephesians 3 Paul divides the human families into two groups—Jews and Gentiles. Instead, in verses 14-15 Paul refers to *every family in heaven*, as well as those on the earth. And this gives us a clue to what he's talking about. Who is in heaven? They are people who trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior, who believed that when he died on the cross he paid for their sin. When their earthly lives ended, God carried their souls into his presence where they continue to live.

Likewise, "those on earth" refers to people who are living now, who have put their faith in Christ and follow him. John 1:12 says, "*To as many as received Him, who believed in His name, to them he gave power to become the children of God.*" Those who by faith become children of God are members of his family. He is our Father, we are his children. We bear his name. So here is what Paul means: If you love Jesus and have placed your faith in him, you are part of the family of God. But not just you. This morning we baptized two little girls. They are members of their parents' family by birth, but when we baptized them, in a formal way we brought them into God's family. Each must place her own faith in Christ when she is old enough to understand in order to claim personally the promises and benefits of God's family, including eternal life. You can extend this to your grandchildren and your great grandchildren. Paul wants us to get used to thinking in this manner. See your family as the family of God. Your family is holy.

Now notice something more. In verse 14 Paul says, *“I bow my knees before the Father.”* He is praying for the family of God. Christian families need to do this. My mom and dad prayed for me every day of my life. Now they are both in heaven, the part of our family that resides there in the presence of God. I am confident that they continue to pray for me and for Barb and for our children from that vantage point. Barb and I pray for each other every day, and for our sons. We have done that since each of them was born. And we pray for our daughters-in-law, and for our granddaughter. Our two sons who are married pray together with their wives day by day. Now, let me ask you, how do families learn to pray? The primary way is that today’s parents practiced praying with their families when they were children. Don’t leave your children to figure out how to pray with their families on their own as if they had no Christian background. Take time now to teach them by praying with them day by day. If your children are small, that’s not so hard. You scoop them up at bedtime and say prayers with them and kiss them goodnight and turn out the light. But when they’re older it’s more difficult. The easiest way then is for the family to pray around the table at breakfast or dinner. Encourage each family member to pray briefly about the needs of the day or the struggles of their lives. You say you don’t eat together much as a family? Then change your schedule. Consider the alternative: If you don’t make the time to pray with your kids, they could end up living prayerless lives and important things will never get prayed for.

What should we pray for as we pray for our families? This is the final matter Paul considers in chapter 3. Notice four things he asks God the Father to do. First, in verse 16 he prays for the Holy Spirit to work in the heart of each family member. It is God who motivates a person in spiritual things. If you have a child or other family member who is hard-hearted or stubborn when it comes to loving God, ask God to overcome their resistance. Second, in verse 17 he prays for the salvation of the various members of the family. Do you have one in your family who is far from God? Pray for him. It took forty years of daily prayer by my mom and dad before her brother and sisters and their children began coming to faith in Christ. Then, third, in verse 18 Paul prays for the spiritual growth of the members of the family. Pray for the effectiveness of our Sunday school and our youth ministry, and for God to work in the mind of your husband or wife as they participate in a Bible study group. Finally, fourth, in verse 19, Paul prays that family members may *“know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that [they] may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”* That’s a prayer for spiritual maturity.

I had one of those “duh” moments a couple of years ago. When our sons moved away from home, Barb and I prayed more urgently for them than we ever had when they were children, because now we have almost no influence on the decisions they make. I worried. Their very spiritual lives seemed continually to hang in the balance and they seemed so young. How would they ever make really wise decisions in their choices about following God? Then it hit me! I was exactly like them when I was their age. But God led me through those years and helped me to grow up in my relationship with Christ. And my dad, whom I always looked to as a godly model—he was just as immature early in his adult life. But God worked in him. I realized that as we pray God does in each generation what he’s been doing for thousands of years. Verse 20 says, God *“is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that*

*works within us.*” What he did in my life, I can see him doing it in my sons. He’ll do it in my grandchildren. Relax and trust God! See your family as God’s family.

**2. Do what you see God do.** We’ve been talking about how to carry out the Christian family’s sacred goal. The first part is that we pray for each family member, asking the Father to do his work in their lives. But there are things you and I must do ourselves. Turn to chapter 5 and let’s look at them. In chapter 5, verse 1 Paul says, *“Be imitators of God, as beloved children.”* Children learn by imitating. Parents are the model and their children imitate them. We were talking on the phone to our granddaughter, Ashley. Barb said to her, “Say, ‘lion.’” And this little voice said “lion.” Barb said, “How does a lion go?” And there was silence. Barb asked again, “Ashley, how does a lion go?” Still more silence. Then her mother came on the phone. “Sorry,” she said. “Ashley’s run off to get the lion magnet off the refrigerator.” Ashley doesn’t know this yet, but we bought her a lawnmower for her birthday next month. It blows bubbles. We’re giving her the mower because she will want to copy her daddy when he’s cutting the grass. In verses 2-14 Paul gives us three things to model for our children so they learn to know and serve God, and so they will model these things for their children.

First of all, he says, **model love.** *“Walk in love,”* he says in verse 2. If you were blessed, your parents loved you and therefore you know how to love your children. But what if your parents didn’t love you very well? I talked with a woman last week who with her husband has taken in her twelve-year-old niece for the Summer. The girl’s parents have own a \$300,000 house and nice cars, but they’ve not loved their daughter. They haven’t beaten her or abused her in any way. But both mom and dad are busy working all the time. They’ve left their child on her own with little input or instruction. The girl isn’t expected to do anything—not chores or reading or studying. She sleeps or watches TV or plays on her computer. My friend told her niece to write her mom a letter and gave her an envelope and stamps. The girl hadn’t the slightest idea of how to address a letter. She placed the address in the upper right corner and put the stamp in the upper left corner. This little girl’s parents don’t love her. They don’t care. They don’t parent.

Maybe you grew up like that but now you’ve become a Christian. You’re a bit like the Christians of Ephesus who now had to love their children but had no idea how a Christian parent loves his child. You don’t need a self-help book. Paul says in verse 2, *“Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you.”* How did Christ love? He *“gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.”* Go to the pages of Scripture and study Jesus. He was a servant to his people. He taught and corrected and instructed. And of course he suffered for us on the cross. Notice Paul calls this a sacrifice. What does it mean to sacrifice for your children? It means their welfare takes precedent over yours. More important than your career or making a lot of money or having what your neighbors have or being happy. Love means loving your kid’s mother or father. It means being there at important times. And showing affection. Model love so your kids learn to love.

Second, **remove the immoral** from your life. Imitate God so your children can imitate you. Paul says in verses 3-4, *“Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper with saints; and there must be no filthiness and*

*silly talk, or coarse jesting which are not fitting.*” The pagan city of Ephesus was full of the immoral and pornographic. Pagan religion glorified homosexuality. Heterosexual prostitution was rampant and an accepted part of life and religious practice. Sexually transmitted diseases were epidemic. People’s talk reflected this. Wives had no choice but to endure their husbands’ infidelities. This was a self-centered culture, and no one thought twice about sin. When people turned to Christ, Paul called them to a new standard of holiness and behavior they’d never seen modeled.

But Paul wasn’t just condemning a certain kind of lifestyle. He called for a substitution. In other words, for the Christian, it’s not what you’re against. It’s what you’re for. In verse 4 he says, *“Rather give...thanks.”* In other words, focus on the good things God has given you. Cultivate in your family an atmosphere of appreciation. For example, instead of lusting for the greener grass of forbidden sex, rivet your attention on the good points of your husband or wife. Gather your family at meal times and teach them to thank God for what he has provided. List your blessings instead of lamenting what you lack. In verses 5-6 he urges us not to admire the immoral or dishonest person, even though they seem to have it made. Remember that you have heaven to look forward to. In verse 7 he tells us not to build friendships with those who bring the influences of sin into our homes. Instead, spend time with families, both adults and children, who share your godly values. That way you and your children reinforce your faith.

Third, **maintain the lights.** In verse 8 Paul says, *“Walk as children of the light.”* The other evening a storm blew in at suppertime and the lights flickered. Barb and I raced for candles and put them on the table. And then everything went dark. I fumbled around in a drawer searching for the butane candle lighter. I couldn’t find it. That’s when I discovered that wives can see in the dark. Barb reached around me, pulled it out and thrust it into my hand. I couldn’t make it work in the dark. She could. And soon the candles were lit and we could see to eat our meal. What do we need to see? In verse 9 Paul says, *“The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”* This is what we want our children to learn. They live in a culture that can no longer discern what is good or righteous or true. Maybe you have a hard time with that. The Ephesians had not seen those things modeled. So Paul reminds us in verse 10 that we’re *“trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”* You’re not going to get it right all the time. When you discover that sin has stuck its ugly head into your family, don’t cover it up. Most people try to hide sin so they look acceptable. Not the Christian. In verse 11 he tells us to expose sin. Why? Because in exposure there is the possibility of forgiveness and reinforcement not to do it again. Teach your children to admit their mistakes and take responsibility for their sin, and then do better next time. What is the Christian family’s sacred goal? To raise children who love Christ and live for him, children who are able to teach their own children the things of God. If you’re any kind of father, dads, that’s what you aim for. Because that’s the goal of your heavenly Father. And how do you get your kids to believe the truth? Live it yourself. See the promise in the last line of verse 14. Do this, Paul says, and *“Christ will shine on you.”*