

The Building of a Home

Proverbs 24:1-4: "Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief. Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches."

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The one word which describes the contents of the entire book of Proverbs) a word which is also found in our text, is the word "wisdom." Proverbs is the great book of wisdom. If you want to know what wisdom is, then you must read Proverbs 8, where wisdom is described and where it is very clear that wisdom is Christ. He who possesses Christ is the one who is truly wise. It is this life of wisdom which the wise man of Israel describes in the book of Proverbs.

In chapter 24, Solomon, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is applying wisdom to the life of families in the home. Although the whole chapter has to do with this subject, it is to the first four verses that I call your attention, because the foundation for the entire chapter is laid here.

The text says: it is through wisdom that a home is builded and established. But this wisdom by which a home is established is set in sharp contrast to the sin of envy. Be not thou envious against evil men. On the contrary, it is through wisdom that a home is builded. So wisdom is contrasted here with envy. Envy is characteristic, therefore, of the fool. He who gives himself over to envy is incapable of building a home.

What Is A Home

The text speaks of the building of a *house*. However, when the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament Scriptures, speak of a house, they refer not to a dwelling place in which a family lives, but they refer to a home. There is an important difference between a house and a home. Carpenters build houses; parents build homes. And the quality and spiritual character of a home is not in any sense of the word dependent upon the quality and value of the house. It is possible to have a house that costs in excess of \$1,000,000.00, but is no home. It is also possible to have a home in the humblest of circumstances. A home is not dependent upon a house.

What is a home?

Ordinarily and generally speaking, a home refers to those who live in a dwelling, and particularly to a family. And a family, generally speaking, is composed of husband and wife with their children. It is possible, according to the Lord's ordinance, that a husband and a wife never are given children. They also have a home. Even a widow or a

widower can have a home. And parents whose children are married have a home. But, generally speaking, the Lord has ordained that a home consists of parents and children.

That in itself, however, does not guarantee a home. There are many dwelling-places in the world where you find parents and children, but you do not find a home.

So, a home is more than parents and children. It is a place in which a family dwells together in fellowship - in the fellowship of love, of a mutual sharing of life, of joy and happiness. The key word is "fellowship." If you have a house in which there are parents and children and you have dissension in that house, you have no home. That is why Solomon, in all seriousness, speaks more than once in the book of Proverbs about the fact that it is "better to dwell upon a housetop alone than in the same house with a contentious woman." Solomon makes this clear in another way when he writes: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Where there is no love, no harmony, no unity, no fellowship, it is impossible to have a home. And what is the use of living in a house that is not a home?

A home is a work of God's grace. Although the family was established in Paradise when God married Adam and Eve and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, this home was fundamentally destroyed by the Fall. A cancer, a fatal, terminal cancer entered the home with sin. Sin makes it impossible to establish a true home. Our homes, if they are truly such, are marvelous wonders of grace through Jesus Christ, Who is Himself the foundation on which our homes are built.

Because the main characteristic of a home is fellowship, its essential character is that it is a manifestation and picture of God's covenant. God is in Himself a family God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus also His own triune covenant life of fellowship is a family life. By the work of grace, He forms His church into a heavenly family in which the Triune God is our Father, Christ is our elder Brother, and all God's people are brothers and sisters together in the family of God.

A home is, therefore, a covenant family.

Now that means that not only do husband and wife in the bond of marriage serve as a picture of God's covenantal marriage with His people through Christ, but parents and children also reflect that covenant of grace. The family of God is reflected in our covenant families when each member of the family has his or her own God-given place in the life of the family, a place that no one else can fill, a place within the fellowship of the family where each in his or her own way contributes uniquely to the life of the family. That is why there is always room for another child in a covenant family. That is why we even talk about the place which each child occupies in the family life. We even go so far as to say that each has his own place at the table where the family sits down together to eat and to drink, to pray and to worship. And if God is pleased to take away one of our children, then his place is empty and no one can ever fill it. Even though parents may have more children, that place stays empty because the child who occupied that place had his own place in the life and fellowship of the family which remains for all time.

empty until the perfection of the covenant in the great glory of the family of heaven. So it is with the family of God. Each saint has his or her own place in the family.

That family of God, even as our covenant families, has a home. When Jesus was about to depart from His disciples on the eve of His death, He spoke of this when He spoke of the fact that in His Father's home (and that is the right word here), there were many dwelling places. He had to go to prepare each dwelling place for each member of the family for whom He was about to die. And when that dwelling place was ready, He would come again to take such a one to Himself, that where He was, and is, we might be also.

God's covenant, which is the great family of God, is of such a kind that each within that family has his own place, in this life and in the life to come. And just as in our families there is room for little children, room for grown-up children, for teenagers, room for sick people, and room for handicapped people who have their own unique place and who are also embraced in the love and fellowship of the family because of the unique place God has given to them, so in the heavenly family of God each with his own character and with his own particular kind of person that he is has his own place in the family of God. We have a bit of a taste of the great family of heaven in our own family life.

In such a home there is opportunity for each member of the family, without fear of ridicule or scorn, knowing that he or she will be understood by those who love him or her, to pour out his soul and share with those of the family all of his griefs and sorrows, troubles and problems, knowing that the family will make them its own. Home is the place where one can be himself, where there is no need to put on a mask, where there is no need to pretend to be different from what one is, because in the family there is love and patience and understanding as God in infinite grace shows love and patience and understanding to us who belong to His family and who are so weak and so sinful.

How A Home Is Built

We are called in the text to *build* a home, and to *establish* a home. Those two words are not exactly the same in their meaning. To build a home means to erect a home. To establish a home means to erect a home on a firm foundation, with the implication that that home is going to be bombarded with fierce storms. One is reminded of the words with which Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount: the wise man builds his home upon the rock, for the storms are sure to come. And only a home built upon the rock will weather successfully the storms of life.

So we are required to do two things: we are required not only to build a home, but to build it upon such a firm foundation and to build it with such care and attention to detail that it is a strong home so that no matter how fiercely the storms of life may batter against that home, it stands. Homes not built with care are homes destroyed by life's storms. Only homes built firmly on a rock continue to stand. In the world, under the pressure of trouble, marriages are dissolved and families broken up. Families who reflect God's covenant are families driven closer together in life's storms.

How are we to build a home?

It is here that the text takes an unexpected turn. The Holy Spirit says, first of all: Before you learn how to build a home, there are some things which you ought *not* to do. It is like a carpenter who is giving instructions to a novice on how to build a house. Before he says anything about the techniques of building a house, he takes this novice aside and says, 'there are a couple of things that you must never, never do, because if you do, your house will be a failure. These are important things, fundamental principles which, if you observe them, will make it possible for you to build a house. There are, on the other hand, fundamental dangers and errors which, if you fall into them, will make it forever impossible for you successfully to build a house.

Two sins are mentioned in the text. One is envy and the other is companionship with the wicked. "Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them."

That ought to give us pause. I am reasonably certain that if you had been asked to give your answer to this question: What are the two greatest evils that threaten the building of a home? there would have been very few who would have mentioned these two evils which the text mentions. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is saying that in all the catalog of evil, in all the long lists of sins that can conceivably be drawn up, there are two, above all else, which ultimately make it impossible to build a home.

Envy. You all know what envy is. Envy is, first of all, dissatisfaction with what you have, with what God has given *you*. Secondly, envy is a strong desire to have the things which you do not have, and which the world has in great abundance. Envy is really the same as covetousness, which is forbidden in the Tenth Commandment. And covetousness, as the Heidelberg Catechism explains in the exposition of the law of God, is a sin which really lies at the heart of the whole law. If you are covetous, it is impossible to keep *any* of the commandments of God.

Now you can begin to understand why the Holy Spirit should particularly talk here about the sin of envy. Paul, in his letters to Timothy, and in warning against the dangers of riches, talks about the fact that the love of money is the root of *all* evil. I can remember, as a child, that I could not understand that. Every evil under the heavens? Yes, says Paul. The love of money is the root of all evil. Covetousness is the fundamental sin of the law. Envy, therefore, is a crucial sin which, if we do not root it out of our lives, will make it impossible for us to build a home. That is sobering! That brings us to our knees.

Why is envy such a threat to the building of a home? That is easily demonstrated. It sometimes happens that young men (especially young men, but sometimes young women too), postpone looking for mates because they love too well the things of the world and material possessions. They want to buy this, and they want to buy that. They want to enjoy this, and they want to enjoy that before they really begin building a home. Envy is such a great evil that it already threatens even starting a home. But, after marriage takes place and a young man and a young woman enter into marriage, the same evil threatens. Envy becomes the reason why having children is put off. And

maybe sometimes envy is the reason a husband and wife decide not to have any children at all, or maybe just one or no more than two.

Envy does that. Children get in the way. Children cost money. Children make it impossible for husbands and wives to buy the things they want and to enjoy the things of life. Especially when you have to pay Christian school tuition, then you say to yourselves, 'We had better not have any more children. We do not know how in the world we are going to pay all the Christian school tuition.' Envy gets in the way of having children.

Envy is a threat, a perpetual threat to the home, even when a family is created and there are children in the home, because sometimes mothers forsake the responsibilities of the home and go out to work. Parents want more money. There are things they want to buy which they cannot buy if they do not have two sources of income. Or, the entire atmosphere of the home is of such a kind that money and possessions, pleasures and the good things of life are almost the sole topic of conversation. An atmosphere is created in the home in which the distinct impression which is given to children is this: The only thing that counts in life is the possession of earthly goods.

Envy is a threat to the building of a home every step along the way. How wise, how pointed the Holy Spirit is when He says to you and to me: "there is one evil which above all else constitutes a fatal threat to the building of a home: the sin of envy.

Do you wish, by God's grace, to build a home? This sin of envy must be rooted out!

The other sin that is mentioned is companionship with the wicked.

The text does not have reference to the fact that we live in a wicked world and that we must rub elbows with the wicked every day of our lives. We are in the world. And we are not going to escape the world by moving into a monastery. But that is not what the text has in mind. It has in mind fellowship with wicked people. There is something exclusive about the companionship and fellowship of the family and, as an extension of the family, the church. How often do not the Scriptures tell us that? In the family and in the church we have fellowship because it is a fellowship in God through Christ - covenantal fellowship. When efforts are made to transfer that fellowship and companionship to relationships with wicked men of the world, then disaster strikes.

James, in the sharpest possible language, reminds the church to which he writes, that when they seek to be friends of the world, they are adulterers and adulteresses who cannot be the friends of God.

It is possible, of course, to go out into the world and seek the fellowship of the wicked. There are members of the church who do that. But it is also possible, and perhaps a greater threat to our homes, to invite the world into the home. We have at our disposal, in our modern day, all kinds of ways of doing that -of bringing the companionship of the world into the home. I refer not simply to the fact that we make a place in our home for

people who are wicked, although that is forbidden by the Scriptures; but that we make a place in our home for the world and for wicked men, by means of today's modern inventions: television, radio, VCR's, and worldly videos, music of the world, books of the world, magazines of the world. We seek to have fellowship and companionship with the world by sharing in their sins.

Why ought we to have no fellowship with wicked men? The answer of the text is: Their heart studieth destruction and their lips talk of mischief. Or you could put it this way: Their heart studieth violence and their lips talk of iniquity. From their heart proceeds a stream of violence. And, as you know, the heart is the fountain from which flows all the issues of life. Violence is in their hearts and violence pours forth. Violence against God, and violence against Christ; violence against marriage; violence against the home; violence against neighbors; and violence against everyone. Violence pours forth in a stream from their heart. When you admit into the home violence against God and against His law, against all that is holy and sacred, against marriage and against childbearing, it is impossible to build a home. That is the Holy Spirit's assessment of life. And He knows!

And, iniquity is in their lips. That is all the wicked talk about-sin. You never hear anything else from them. Iniquity! They cannot talk about anything else. They may seemingly be speaking of innocuous things. And we say, "Oh, that's not so bad; I never heard any swear words or anything like that." The Holy Spirit says that their lips talk of iniquity. And, to let someone in your home who talks about nothing else but iniquity is an intolerable threat to the erection of a Christian, covenantal home.

Would you really do that if you were intent on building a covenant home where the fear of the Lord is? Would you invite a man to live with you who refused to pray with you, who persistently mocked the church, who laughed at marriage, who was immoral and adulterous, who blasphemed the name of God, who desecrated the Lord's Sabbath Day? Would you have a man like that in the house? You do it. You invite men like that into the house. And you give them the opportunity to say everything that they want to say - in the presence of your children. Would you invite a whore into your home who parades her sexuality? Would you invite to live with you a heavy-metal rock group? Yet you do all of this when you turn on your television.

A home cannot be built that way. Those are corroding and corrupting influences that make it impossible to build a home.

What is needed to build a home? The text says three things are needed: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Through wisdom is a home builded. And by understanding it is established. And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

We must look briefly at these three requirements for building a home.

By knowledge is meant the true knowledge of God through Jesus Christ as it is revealed and given to us in Holy Scripture. The blueprints of a Christian home are found in Holy Scripture. You do not need books. You do not need videos from a marriage institute. All you need is Scripture. I wonder why people can not get that straight. Perhaps it is so hard to do this because it takes some conscious effort to be a student of Holy Scripture. We are always looking for the shortcut, the easy way, the simple formula that will guarantee success in building a home. What we really want is a simple formula that will give us success while we continue on our own selfish and envious ways. But the Bible is the blueprint. It is all there, down to the minutest details.

I sometimes get the impression that young married couples especially are of the opinion that homes come into being automatically, something like Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - "she just grewed." They do not have to do anything about it. It does not require any effort. They can live and go about their business and somehow or other a home will be automatically built.

It never works that way. It is hard work to build a home. We have the promise of God's faithfulness, that He will establish His covenant with us and with our children and save us in our generations. But His promise does not mean that we can walk in the ways of disobedience and unfaithfulness. God continues His covenant in the line of generations only in the way of our faithfully building a home. And that requires of parents that they give constant, detailed attention to all the seemingly insignificant parts that go to build a home. Husbands must pay attention to their wives; and wives must live their role in submission to their husbands. Husbands and wives together must be sure that they build a marriage. It does not happen automatically. They have to be attentive to the details. You have to kiss your wife once in a while. You have to tell her you love her. You have to pray for her. You have to talk with her. Some young couples whose marriages are in deep trouble can not understand for the life of them why their marriages are in trouble. Then one talks with them a little while and it soon becomes evident that they never pay any attention to building a marriage and establishing it upon a firm rock.

And so with children, a home just does not happen automatically. It requires constant attention to detail, to the details of the blueprint. Scripture tells us how to raise a family. But close attention to the blueprint is required. And that is Holy Writ.

The word "understanding" emphasizes the fact that this knowledge which is so crucial to the building of the home has to be a knowledge which arises out of love for God. A wicked man can read the Bible too, but he does not understand it with the true, spiritual understanding that is required to build a home. The way to understand the Scriptures is to come before the Scriptures as a little child; to come to them with a humble heart; to come to them with a willingness to bow in submission before them; to come to them with the earnest desire to be instructed at the feet of Jesus. One can come to the Scriptures and can hear what the Scriptures say; and yet he can respond: Yes, but if I do what the Scriptures say, that gets in the way of what I want to do. So I'll put that off; I'll put off what the Scriptures say. I'll give attention to that some time in the fixture." That

is not understanding. Understanding means the humble, childlike willingness to be obedient to the Word of God no matter the cost.

What is wisdom? God is wise, and God's wisdom is personified in Christ and revealed through Him. God shows His wisdom in Christ. In His own eternal and unchangeable purpose God chooses what is the highest possible goal and purpose of all He does. And then He chooses the best possible way to attain that goal. The goal is the glory of His own Name through Jesus Christ. And the way to attain the great glory of His own Name, the highest possible purpose, is the all-wise way of Christ and the salvation of the church through Christ. All of history as it serves the establishment of His kingdom, is through Christ.

When God confers wisdom upon His people, He enables them to do as He does. We choose the highest possible goal, by God's grace, for our lives. And we choose the best possible way to attain that goal.

What is that highest possible goal that wisdom chooses? Is it to have a \$200,000.00 home and two new cars? Is that the highest possible goal? You would think sometimes when you look at the lives of the people of God that it is. Well, then, the best way to attain that goal is, of course, to be envious of evil men and seek their companionship and their fellowship. If your goal is to build a home, you are wise. If you use the best means at your disposal to build such a home, you are wise. The way to build is by following the blueprint of the Scriptures. The wise man follows the blueprint. By wisdom is a home built.

A wise man makes the goal of his life the building of a home where the covenant of God with His people is reflected; a home where the Word rules; a home where the conversation is spiritual; a home where Christ is King; a home where parents and children alike live in the fear of the Lord. That is the only important thing to him. Everything else goes by the board. And because wisdom is essentially Christ (see Proverbs 8), a home is built on Christ the Rock. To build on Christ the Rock means that parents and children alike recognize how utterly difficult and humanly impossible it is to build such a home. They are, therefore, daily to be found at the foot of the cross to confess their sins, to seek forgiveness and pardon, and to find grace to help in time of need.

The Blessedness Of It

When parents are wise a home is built that is established upon Christ. And when the storms of life come, as they surely shall, that home stands. The storms of a world raging in lust and fornication batter against that home, but cannot destroy it. A world where earthly possessions are the be-all and end-all of life cannot destroy it. Where the storms of troubles and sorrows, afflictions and sufferings blow against that home, that home is not, as in the world, torn to pieces, but the storms serve to drive the family closer together. It is a home built and established on the Rock.

Such a home will be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

In Solomon's day that meant pleasant and precious riches in the land of Canaan, because Canaan was a picture of heaven. God showed Israel a little bit of what heaven was like in that land flowing with milk and honey. When Israel did not build homes that were covenant homes, the captivity was the end and Canaan became a wasteland. In the new dispensation the reference is to the riches of the heavenly Canaan. The blessedness of a covenant home is not material riches, or earthly wealth.

A covenant home has the greater treasures that endure forever. It is a home where there is peace and quietness, tranquillity and serenity. It is a home where the favor of God rests, which is more important to the child of God than anything else. It is a home where there is laughter and fun, love and joy, patience and understanding. It is a home where Christ is worshipped and served. It is a home where the troubles of life can be escaped, a haven, a harbor in the storm. It is a home where the family experiences, in its family life, the riches of God's covenant.

Those are precious and pleasant riches, far to be preferred over earthly treasures.

It is a home in which is to be found the beginnings of heaven, for it reflects the covenant family of God.

It is a home from which parents and children finally depart to their home of many mansions where Christ has prepared a place for them.