

# **My Life for Yours**

A Walk though the  
Christian Home

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## Introduction

Welcome to another book on the family, one that covers the perennial issues of the home from another vantage point.

The origins of this book are somewhat eclectic. I preached a series of sermons on this theme and wrote most of the chapters around the sermon outlines. The sermonic and pointed nature of the second-person plural address is still visible (I hope), while at the same time becoming formal enough to warrant having a justified margin. “The Junk Drawer” chapter is taken from a series of email meditations, entitled *Grace and Peace*, sent out to our church on a weekly basis.

I am particularly grateful to Thomas Howard, who wrote a fine book a number of years ago following the same poetic conceit—that of working through all the rooms of the house. His book was entitled *Splendor in the Ordinary* and was a very helpful and edifying work. Those who haunt used book stores would do well to keep an eye out for it. Though we follow the same conceit, and his house apparently had a lot of the same rooms that mine does, the differences still are worth noting. His Roman Catholic trajectory was evident even at that time, just as I trust that my Puritan trajectory is in evidence here. At the same time, as one mere Christian to another, I owe him for the wonderful phrase, *my life for yours*.

## The Front Porch and Door

*And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. (Deut. 11:20–21)*

As Christians, our central concern should be to have our worship of God pervade everything we do. But if worship applied relates to how we live, then it must also relate to *where* we live. The goal of this book, therefore, is to work through every room of the house, seeing what we discover there in the light of the Scriptures. And we will start on the front porch, just outside the door.

We see in the text above the importance of an overt and visible dedication of the home to God and His Word. This dedication to God is not to be a compartmentalized affair—that is, it’s not limited to one room in the house or to one day of the week. The claims of God are always *total*, which can be seen on the doorposts.

The dedication and design of the Temple (1 Kgs. 6:3; 1 Chr. 28:11) extended from the porch to the altar (Joel 2:17). In the same way, the dedication of our homes to Christ includes the porch and the front door as an important symbol. Slaves were dedicated permanently at the door (Exod. 21:6). Aaron and his sons were consecrated at the door of the tabernacle (Exod. 29:4). The ascension (consecration) offerings were closely associated with the

door of the tabernacle (Exod. 29:42). The tithes were collected at the door (2 Kgs. 12:9). A wonderful conjunction of this symbolism is found when God was worshipped at the door of the tabernacle by every man in the door of his tent.

And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. (Exod. 33:8–10)

As Christians, we ascend to the gates of heaven in our worship on the Lord's Day. As we do, one greater than Moses goes before us. As we consider this, an important question for us to keep in mind is this: are we worshipping rightly *from the doors of our homes*? Doors are a place of dedication, and so it's fitting for us to begin our consideration of how we are to live together as Christians at the front door.

### **GRACE AND LAW**

Christians are often unnecessarily bothered by the relationship of grace and law. But the preface to the Ten Commandments is actually a wonderful statement of *grace*. God had brought them up out of the house of bondage, and then afterwards He graciously gave them His law. It's the same kind of thing here. We show our allegiance to God and His word by displaying His law on the doorposts of the house. But in the households of Israel, these were the same doorposts where the blood of the Passover lamb had been placed.

And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. (Exod. 12:7; cf., 22–23)

First the blood, then the law. It's the same in the New Covenant—first the blood of Christ, and then the word of that same Christ. The one who gave Himself for us as a sacrifice is the same one who speaks to us as our Lord. So, while the law on the doorposts shows we are dedicated to God, the blood (that was there first) shows we are a house of *forgiven sinners* dedicated to God. Because Christ is our Paschal sacrifice and our high priest, it follows that He is also our prophet and our king. And all these realities are seen, though in a figure, at our front door.

#### A FALLEN WORLD

In this world, corrupted as it is by sin, and threatened by sin, doors and gates are a necessary protection. In the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church, such protections are not necessary (Rev. 21:25; Is. 60:11), but short of that glory they always are (Ezek. 38:11; Jer. 49:31). When the residents of Sodom threatened his guests, Lot guarded them at the door, and he guarded them with the door (Gen. 19:6). When God destroyed the antediluvian world with the Flood, the distinction between the inside of the ark and the outside of it was the most important distinction on earth, and that distinction was sealed and marked with the door (Gen. 6:16). A door protects us against the weather and against intruders.

A door therefore speaks of protection. In this respect, it is a symbol of the husband and father. Just as God placed Adam in the garden to tend and keep it, assigning him the priestly task of protection, in the same way husbands should exercise their responsibility to be a door of protection for their families. Adam failed in his duty, and we see the tragic consequences of a husband who is a broken door, hanging from one hinge.

Wives need to know that their husbands are a door of protection for them. Children need to grow up in the kind of security that only a stout door can provide. Because it's a fallen world, because Adam was not the door he ought to have been, fathers today need to give this gift to their children.

### WHO BELONGS?

A door marks the place where those who *belong* are free to enter. Jesus taught that thieves and robbers seek other means of entry than a door. In that context, He was speaking of salvation, but the principle remains an important one. Those whose presence is life-giving come through the door. Those who intend harm avoid the door (Jn. 10:1–2,7–10). We see this principle also in the parable of the foolish virgins (Mt. 25:10). A shut door excludes those who don't belong.

Those who come through the door are therefore *family* in some sense. They may be family by blood because they came through the organic door of birth. They may be family as extended guests (boarders), or they may simply be family for an evening (dinner guests). But if they came through the door, biblical hospitality means that all are gathered in some kind of family. Hosts and guests together *belong*. Because this is so, we are therefore to keep our own doors and respect the doors of others. Job says that if he violated the doorway of a neighbor then his house in turn should be violated.

If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbor's door; Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges. For it is a fire that consumeth to destruction, and would root out all mine increase. (Job 31:9–12)

## WIPE YOUR FEET

But family does not mean pandemonium. Doors are guarded against intruders, as we saw earlier. But doors are also guarded against the wear and tear brought by family—by people who belong. We need order and hierarchy in order to be able to live together, and it's important to note that while the Bible teaches the husband is the head of the wife, and the head of the *household*, in a very real sense the wife is the head of the *house*. This is something which should be very clear to everyone in the home, and it should be clear at the *door*.

The apostle Paul says this: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Tim. 5:14). The phrase "guide the house" is a translation of one Greek word which literally rendered (in its form as a noun) would be *house-despot*. The apostle says something similar elsewhere. "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 (Tit. 2:4–5). "Keepers at home" renders one word which would literally be *home-guard*.

How is this first word (*oikodespotes*) used elsewhere in Scripture? Some of the other uses show clearly the idea of a true and functioning *authority* (Mt. 10:25; 13:27, 52; 20:1, 11; 21:33; 24:43). The idea of a wife as live-in maid or all-purpose drudge is antithetical to the scriptural pattern. The woman of the house is the mistress of her domain (and it is *her* domain); she has authority that can and should be exercised over the members of that household. This extends to issues great and small: The laundry goes here, shoes come off at the door, rinse the dishes before they go in the dishwasher.

And so I want to say something here which could easily be misunderstood or misrepresented, but it's still necessary. A husband as the head of his wife is an honored

and permanent guest, but he should learn to see himself *as a guest*. Another way of saying this is that one of a husband's central duties is that of providing his wife with a domain where she exercises the kind of authority you see throughout that famous Proverbs 31 passage. One of the striking things about conservative Christians is how often they can cite that passage without paying attention to just exactly what is going on in it. That woman, whose price is above rubies, works in real estate, manages a vineyard, manufactures textiles, labors as a seamstress, works as a philanthropist, and directs all the servant girls. In short, she is the very model of an *oikodespotes*.

Just as God gave Adam a garden to tend and keep, so a husband is to provide his wife with a garden to tend and keep. This is no pretence; there is genuine delegation and genuine responsibility involved in this. And the authority of the woman over the house should be apparent at the front gate of the yard and the front door of the house.

### WISDOM AND FOLLY

The way we are with God at the center will be evident in the *precincts* of our lives. This is certainly the case with the foolish woman of Proverbs. "A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For *she sitteth at the door of her house*, on a seat in the high places of the city" (Prov. 9:13–14). Because this is the case, we are to recognize from a distance how things are and stay away. "Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house" (Prov. 5:8). We are not to seek to go through the doors of folly; we should not desire to be guests in any kind of house when sin and folly are emblazoned at the door.

In a similar way, we guard our own doors with all wisdom, seeking to prevent sin from encroaching. We should keep the warning to Cain in mind: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth

at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:7).

Everyone here should want to say with Joshua, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). And this service begins at the door.