

William Penn on the “Well-Governing of My Family,” ca. 1700

Introduction

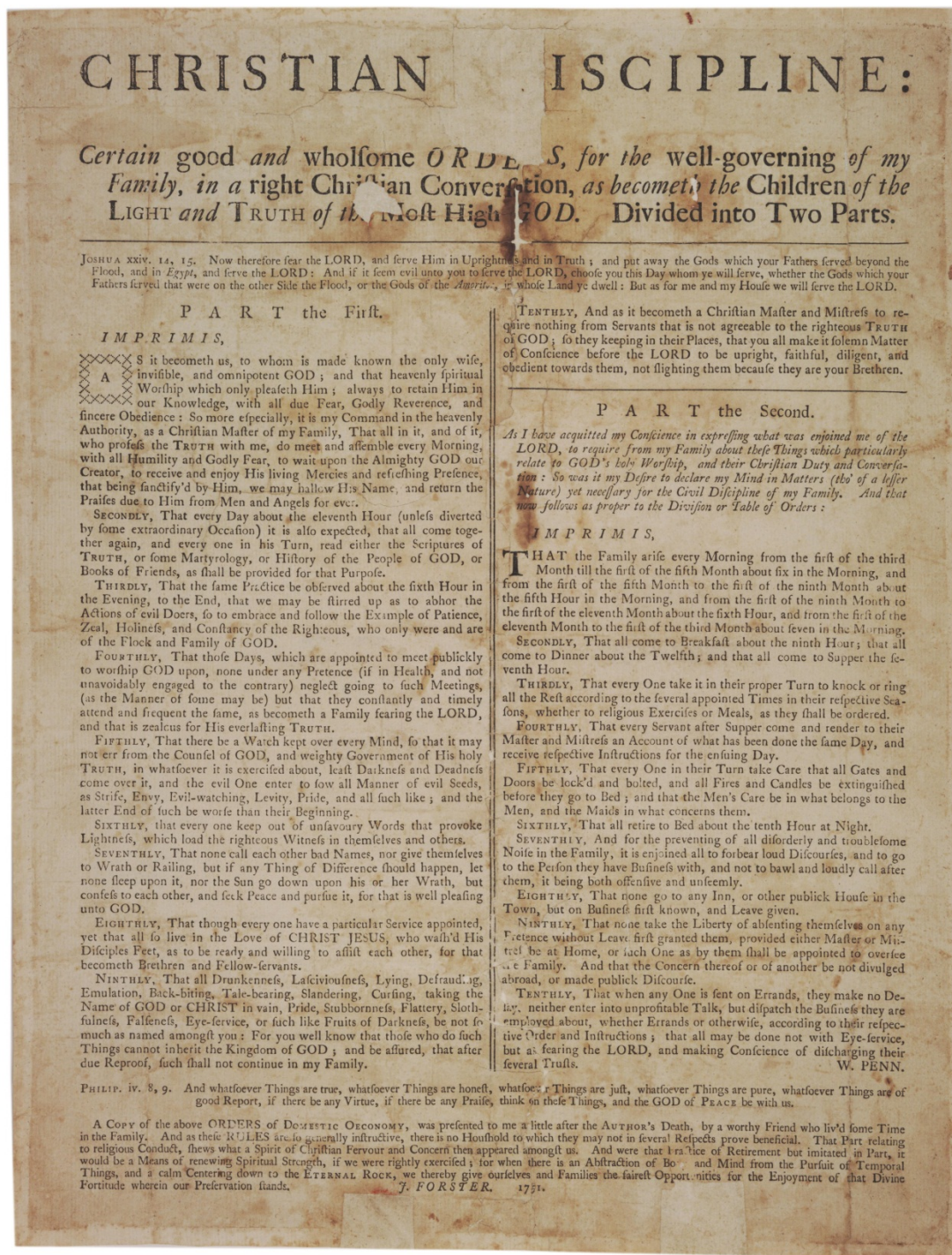
Quaker school teacher Josiah Forster first published this broadside in 1751, thirty years after the death of its author, William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. The treatise, *Christian Discipline: Or Certain Good and Wholesome Orders for the Well-Governing of My Family*, is made up of two lists. The first is a set of religious instructions, made up of orders for worship, prohibitions against certain sinful actions, and commitments to the “Truth of God.” Penn’s ten tenets relating to “God’s holy worship” are intended as a guide for the “Christian master and mistress” in the moral and religious leading of their family. The second list is a set of rules for guaranteeing the “civil discipline” of a household, in which Penn offers a more domestic guide in “matters . . . of a lesser nature” for the running of households. This second guide is particular, indicating times for waking, sleeping, and dining, as well as daily family routines and prohibitions against undesirable behaviors like visiting the “public-house in the town” and taking part in “unprofitable talk.”

In the treatise, Penn refers to himself as the “Christian master” of his earthly family, but we might also read Penn’s orders as his philosophy in the founding of Pennsylvania. *Christian Discipline* opens with a biblical quotation from Joshua 24:14-15: “choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Penn founded the colony as a place for religious tolerance and freedom of worship. Like Joshua, Penn would choose to “serve the Lord.”

In 1751, Forster published Penn’s rules as a call to return to “Christian Fervour and Concern.” Penn’s intention in writing *Christian Discipline* at least thirty years earlier was just that: to offer a guide for Christian families.

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Image



Christian Discipline: Certain Good and Wholesome Orders for the Well-Governing of My Family..., 1751.
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Excerpt

William Penn's Christian Discipline: Certain Good and Wholesome Orders for the Well-Governing of My Family..., 1751. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00246.01)

AS it becometh us, to whom is made known the only wise, invisible, and omnipotent GOD; and that heavenly spiritual Worship which only pleaseth Him, always to retain Him in our Knowledge, with all due Fear, Godly Reverence, and sincere Obedience: So more especially, it is my Command in the heavenly Authority, as a Christian Master of my Family, That all in it, and of it, who profess the Truth with me, do meet and assemble every Morning, with all Humility and Godly Fear, to wait upon the Almighty GOD our Creator, and to receive and enjoy His living Mercies and refreshing Rresence, that being sanctify'd by Him, we may hallow His Name, and return the Praise due to Him from Men and Angels for ever.

Secondly, That every Day about the eleventh Hour, (unless diverted by some extraordinary Occasion) it is also expected, that all come together again, and every one in his Turn, read either the Scriptures of Truth or some Martyrology, or History of the People of GOD, or Boks of Friends, as shall be provided for that Purpose.

Thirdly, That the same Practice be observed about the sixth Hour in the Evening, to the End, that we may be stirred up to abhor the Actions of evil Doers, so to embrace and follow the Example of Patience, Zeal, Holiness, and Constancy in the Righteous, who only were and are of the Flock and Family of GOD.

Fourthly, That those Days, which are appointed to meet publickly to worship GOD upon, none under any Pretence (if in Health, and not unavoidably engaged to the contrary) neglect going to such Meetings (as the Manner of some may be) but that they constantly and timely attend and frequent the same, as becometh a Family fearing the LORD, and that is zealous for His everlasting Truth.

Fifthly, That there be a Watch kept over every Mind, so that it may not err from the Counsel of GOD, and the weighty Government of His holy Truth, in whatsoever it is exercised about, least Darkness and Deadness come over it, and the evil One enter to sow all Manner of evil Seeds, as

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Strife, Envy, Evil-watching, Levity, Pride, and all such like; and the latter End of such is worse than their Beginning.

Sixthly, that every one keep out of unsavoury Words that provoke Lightness, which load the righteous Witness in themselves and others.

Seventhly, That none call each other bad Names, nor give themselves to Wrath or Railing, but if any Thing of Difference should happen, let none sleep upon it, nor the Sun go down upon his or her Wrath, but confess to each other, and seek Peace and pursue it, for it is well pleasing to GOD.

Eighthly, That though every have a particular Service appointed, yet that all so live in the Love of CHRIST JESUS, who wash'd His Disciples Feet, as to be ready and willing to assist each other, for that becometh Brethren and Fellow-servants.

Ninthly, That all Drunkenness, Lasciviousness, Lying, Defrauding, Emulation, Back-biting, Tale-bearing, Slandering, Cursing, taking the name of GOD or CHRIST in vain, Pride, Stubbornness, Flattery, Slothfulness, Falseness, Eye-service, or such like Fruits of Darkness, be not so much as named amongst you: For you well know that those who do such Things cannot inherit the Kingdom of GOD; and be assured that, after due Reproof, such shall not continue in my Family.

Tenthly, And as it becometh a Christian Master and Mistress to require nothing from Servants that is not according to the righteous Truth of GOD; so they are keeping in their Places, that you all make it solemn Matter of Conscience before the LORD to be upright, faithful, diligent, and obedient towards them, not slighting them because they are your Brethren.