

The Priority of Family Worship

- 1) An exhortation of its importance; 2) The Biblical Comments to do it; 3) An exhortation to be an encourager

1) An Exhortation of its Importance

In the introduction to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1677 we read these stirring words:

And verily there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day which we cannot but touch upon and earnestly urge a redress of, and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families by those to whom the charge and conduct of them is committed. May not the gross ignorance and instability of many, with the profaneness of others, be justly charged upon their parents and masters, who have not trained them up in the way wherein they ought to walk when they were young, but have neglected those frequent and solemn commands which the Lord hath laid upon them, so to catechize and instruct them that their tender years might be seasoned with the knowledge of the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures; and also by their own omission of prayer and other duties of religion of their families, together with the ill example of their loose conversation, having, inured them first to a neglect and the contempt of all piety and religion? We know this will not excuse the blindness and wickedness of any, but certainly it will fall heavy upon those that have been thus the occasion thereof; they indeed die in their sins, but will not their blood be required of those under whose care they were, who yet permitted them to go on without warning - yea, led them into the paths of destruction? And will not the diligence of Christians with respect to the discharge of these duties in ages past rise up in judgment against and condemn many of those who would be esteemed such now?

Several Key Points to Notice:

1. The ministers who wrote this did not locate the cause of religious decay in the wickedness of their surrounding culture (drugs, alcohol, homosexuality, liberal media, bad movies, gambling, etc), but rather *in the homes of Christians who neglect the worship of God, prayer, catechizing, and other religious duties in those homes.*
2. The blame for this is to be laid at the feet of those to whom the Bible makes the charge that this is to be done. It is not Satan's or unbelievers' fault.
3. Those who neglect prayer, catechizing, Bible reading, and worship in families inure them to a neglect of and contempt for all piety and religion (i.e. the Christian faith).
 - ⇒ What does inure mean? "to cause to accept or become hardened to."
 - ⇒ By neglecting family worship, Christian parents actually *ingrain* in their children the neglect of the faith of Christ and finally create contempt for it.
 - ⇒ Some of the most hardened enemies of the Christian faith grew up in Christian families. A little known historical fact about Friedrich Nietzsche is that his father was a Lutheran pastor.
4. Those who are blind and wicked will die in their sins, but the responsibility for their destruction lies at least *partially* at the feet of those who failed train them biblically.

Puritan non-conformist Oliver Heywood said this in a sermon:

FOR your sakes, dear Friends, I presume again to appear upon the public stage to be your faithful monitor, to prompt you to your duty, and to promote the work of God in your souls and the worship of God in your families. And I know not how a minister can employ his time, studies, and pen better (next to the conviction and conversion of particular souls), than in pressing upon householders a care of the souls under their charge. This hath a direct tendency to public reformation. Religion begins in individuals and passes on to relatives, and lesser spheres of relationship make up greater: churches and commonwealths consist of families.

⇒ How many pastors or Christians today would agree that next to the conviction and conversion of souls, the most important work pastors can do is "pressing upon householders a care of the souls under their charge."?

Heywood continues: "There is a general complaint of the decay of the power of godliness and inundation of profaneness, and not without cause. I know no better remedy than domestic piety."

2) The Biblical Commands to do it

What is Family Worship? It is the praise, prayer, and adoration given to God by all the members of one household. It consists of prayer, the Word of God, and singing. But this must **never** be thought of in any way as a replacement for the local church and the gathering of the local church for worship.

Husbands and Fathers are the key to the spiritual condition of their wives and children

Ephesians 5:23 [23] For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

1 Corinthians 11:3 [3] But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.

Ephesians 6:4 [4] And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

- ⇒ Question to all men who are husbands and fathers: Does your wife's and your children's countenance reflect that you lead your home joyfully in the things of Christ? Are your children gloomy, sullen *in general*? What is the atmosphere of your home?
- ⇒ Are your wives sorry that they are women because of your headship?
- ⇒ Dad needs to be the principle facilitator of family worship. [We'll get really practical on this point when we look at the family life of Matthew Henry and then Jonathan Edwards]

A Call To Disciplers and Heads of Households – TURN TO: Deuteronomy 6:1-9 [Q: how often do we sit in our homes, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up? Daily]

Remember **Deuteronomy 6:6**, "And these words that I command you today shall be **in your heart.**" It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the great duty of discipling a family or another person. It is hard to know where to begin. But I'd like to suggest Deuteronomy 6:6 as the key to all of it. When it comes to discipling our families, especially our children, to follow Jesus Christ and His Word, **we can easily be sidetracked by: over sheltering from negative influences, being selfish in our desires for our kids (i.e. wanting them to be good so we look good as parents), making a happy home life into an idol, feeling like so much of a failure that we don't even try, and over emphasizing outward behavioral conformity.** But the key to all of it is always our own personal walk with Jesus, our love for Him, and our humility in following His Word. Nothing will affect our relationships more with others than our own walk with the Lord. Should we be concerned about sheltering our children from negative influences? Yes. Should we be interested in their behavior? Yes. Should we endeavor to have a happy home life? Yes. But the foundation of all these things is the *heart*. Many of you, I'm sure, have read Ted Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. There is a great deal of truth in it. We are not merely wanting to transfer data and information to our children like you would copy data from a PC to a thumb-drive. We want to transfer the affections of the heart to our children. We want them to have what we have – a genuine love for and walk with the Lord Jesus. We want them to be saved from their sins – and so we ourselves must live a life of repentance and brokenness ***before them.***

The Consistent Call of Scripture to Heads of Family to "teach!" these truths to their children:

Deuteronomy 4:9-10 [9] "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, [10] *especially concerning* the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.'

Deuteronomy 11:18-19 [18] "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [19] You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Ephesians 6:4 [4] And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Psalms 78:5 [5] For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children;

Joshua 24:15 [15] And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for **me and my house**, we will serve the Lord."

Jeremiah 10:25 [25] Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, And **on the families** who do not call on Your name; For they have eaten up Jacob, Devoured him and consumed him, And made his dwelling place desolate.

A Child's and a Friend's Priceless Possession – People that love them – enough to protect and teach them

On April 28th, 2004, the police uncovered a family (father and daughter) deep in the forests of northwest Oregon. Homeless and destitute, the father had opted not to leave his daughter to grow up on the streets. Instead, he took her into the woods, and for four years they lived in a lean-to in the forest. Police were amazed to find the girl clean, healthy, and . . . educated! There in the forest, the father had loved and disciplined his daughter with nothing but a Bible and a decrepit set of encyclopedias. Officials tested the twelve-year-old and found that she had already achieved a 12th-grade equivalency. Now, ask yourself, how could this be? What was the secret? Police Sgt. Michael Barkley told reporters, "What was so clear was that their living conditions were unacceptable, but their relationship was a real deep love and caring for each other." This little girl had something that few in our day have: **She had a father that loved her.**

Consider these two great texts:

God commands us to have joy and gladness of heart: 1) Deuteronomy 28:47-48 [47] "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.

2) Psalm 128 – Turn to and read. Notice how the man is blessed who fears God and walks in His commandments.

Questions: Do you enjoy God? Do your friends, spouse, and/or children see that you enjoy God? Do you enjoy your friendships? Do you enjoy people in general? Do you enjoy your spouse? Do you enjoy your children? **Passing on the love of Christ to our children *begins in our own hearts* – not in just doing these duties.**

3) An Exhortation to be an Encourager

Be an encourager of others – especially family and children. Take every opportunity to consider what they do well and to give them praise and encouragement. Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." **Proverbs 12:25** "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad." Write your children, friends, loved ones, and spouses notes, pull them aside and tell them how much you love them, and take the time to speak a "good word" that will make their hearts "glad." A kind word from someone that loves you, someone that is important to you ***can make such an incredible difference.*** That's why God includes such passages in His Word. Far too many of our loved ones, our children especially, walk around "discouraged" and "provoked" because we only notice what they do wrong and overlook what they do right. A word of praise and encouragement from someone you know loves you lifts the heart and the chin. Our spouses, friends, and children ***need*** encouragement. [keep encouraging notes]

Matthew Henry on Encouraging Others:

[1.] Countenance everything that is good and praise-worthy in your children and servants. It is as much your duty to commend and encourage those in your family who do well, as to reprove and admonish those who do amiss; and if you take delight only in blaming that which is culpable, and are backward to praise that which is laudable, you give occasion to suspect something of an ill nature, not becoming a good man, much less a good Christian. It should be a trouble to us when we have a reproof to give, but a pleasure to us to say, with the apostle, ([1 Corinthians 11:2.](#)) Now I praise you.

Most people will be easier led than driven, and we all love to be spoken fair to: when you see anything that is hopeful and promising in your inferiors, anything of a towardly and tractable disposition, much more anything of a pious affection to the things of God, you should contrive to encourage it. Smile upon them when you see them set their faces heavenwards, and take the first opportunity to let them know you observe it, and are well pleased with it, and do not despise the day of small things. This will quicken them to continue and abound in that which is good, it will hearten them against the difficulties they see in their way; and, perhaps, may turn the wavering, trembling scale the right way, and effectually determine their resolutions to cleave to the Lord. When you see them forward to come to family worship, attentive to the word, devout in prayer, industrious to get knowledge, afraid of sin, and careful to do their duty, let them have the praise of it, for you have the comfort of it, and God most have all the glory. Draw them with the cords of a man, hold them with the bands of love; so shall your rebukes, when they are necessary, be the more acceptable and effectual. The great Shepherd gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads them; and so should you.

[2.] Discountenance everything that is evil in your children and servants. Use your authority for the preventing of sin, and the suppressing of every root of bitterness, lest it spring up, and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. Frown upon everything that brings sin into your families, and introduces any ill words, or ill practices. Pride and passion, strife and contention, idleness and intemperance, lying and slandering, these are sins which you must not connive at, nor suffer to go without a rebuke. If you return to the Almighty, this among other things is required of you, that you put away iniquity, all iniquity, these and other the like iniquities, far from your tabernacle, [Job 22:23](#). Make it to appear, that in the government of your families you are more jealous for God's honor, than for your own authority and interest; and show yourselves more displeased at that which is an offence to God, than at that which is only an affront or damage to yourselves.

You must indeed be careful not to provoke your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged; and as to your servants, it is your duty to "forbear, or moderate, threatening:" yet you must also, with holy zeal and resolution, and the meekness of wisdom, keep good order in your families, and set no wicked thing before their eyes, but witness against it. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Be afraid of having wicked servants in your houses, lest your children learn their way, and get a snare to their souls. Drive away with an angry countenance all that evil communication which corrupt good manners, that your houses may be habitations of righteousness, and sin may never find shelter in them.

I Samuel 2:12-17; 22-36 – God's rebuke to Eli and his household for v29. Failure to instruct, correct, and restrain children is to "honor your sons more than Me" said God to Eli.

Conclusion: The example of Jonathan Edwards:

"We have had great disputes over how the church ought to be regulated. Indeed the subjects of these disputes was of great importance. But the due regulation of your families if of no less, and in some respects of much greater importance. Every Christian family ought to be, as it were, a little church – consecrated to Christ and wholly influenced and governed by His rules. Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful. Let me now once more before I finally cease to speak to this congregation repeat and earnestly press the counsel which I have often pressed upon the heads of families while I was their pastor. To great painfulness in teaching, warning, and directing their children, bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, beginning early where there is yet opportunity and maintaining constant diligence in labors of this kind. Remember that, as you would not have all your instructions and counsels ineffectual, there must be government as well as instructions that must be maintained with an even hand. And steady resolution as a guard to the religion and morals of your family and the support of its good order, take heed that it not be with any of you as it was with Eli of old who reprov'd his children but restrained them not. And that by this means you do not bring the light first on your families and he did on his."