

Producing Generational Loyalty to God

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“Whereas in 1820 Protestants had thought about children’s religious experiences primarily in terms of family and church, by 1880 it was impossible to conceive of them without reference to the Sunday school. During the nineteenth century, this new institution became the primary locale – outside of the family – for religious indoctrination of Protestant youth. In the annals of church history the saga of Sunday school was unique, involving not only the creation of a new institution to fulfill functions previous entrusted to parents and pastors...”¹

Has it been successful? At present the church is facing a mass exodus of its young people into the hands of the culture. Conservative Seminaries, Bible churches and men well-prepared for the pastorate are shrinking by quantum leaps. In light of the present distress² one response is to reconsider our manner of discipling the next generation. Sunday school has been the order of the day for the last 200 years in America and Youth Ministry programs were added 50 years ago as the primary means of discipling young people.³ And yet with the escalation of these programs the departure from the church among young people has only escalated. As one author says, “It is obvious that youth ministry in America has not produced a generation of young people who are passionate about the church...the number of full time youth pastors has grown dramatically and a plethora of magazines, music, and ideas aimed at youth have been birthed along the way. Meanwhile...the numbers of young people won to Christ dropped at about as fast a rate.”⁴ In the study done by Brit Beemer and reported by Ken Ham the statistics said “Sunday school is actually more detrimental to the spiritual and moral health of our children” than keeping them out.⁵ If we think that it is not as bad in our conservative, bible teaching churches we are only half right. Beemer and Ham are quick to point out that many in the most conservative, Bible-teaching churches in America are “lost while still in the fold.”⁶ While still physically present in the church, they are spiritually absent, having checked out as early as the 4th-5th grade. Some surveys have concluded that as many as 80% of young people are now leaving the church,⁷ others give more conservative estimates around 40%.⁸ Even if the lower figure of 40% is closer to correct that is quite an elephant in the room. Fortunately a few voices are being heard and those voices

¹ Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 160.

² To borrow the language of 1 Cor 7:26.

³ This model is present in other parts of the world because we have exported it there but in many parts of the world they do not use these types of programs.

⁴ Alvin Reid, *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium*, 35, 38, cited by Scott T. Brown, *A Weed in the Church*, (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2011), 129.

⁵ Ken Ham and Brit Beemer, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*, (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 32.

⁶ Ham and Beemer, 38.

⁷ <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years>

⁸ http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20070807/d_churchdropout07.art.htm

are speaking up.⁹ What can we do to halt this mass exodus or at least to slow it down in our small, Bible-teaching circles?

Semper Reformada

Out of the Reformation grew the important Latin expression *semper reformada*, “always reforming.” Pastor-teachers should always be reforming when the church drifts toward the culture so that the church remains in the culture but not of it. Little needs to be said regarding the present direction of our culture but much needs to be said regarding the pastor-teachers response to it. Is there a better way to disciple the next generation than following a model that is built on Sunday school and/or Youth Ministry? What does God say about the means of transmitting truth to the next generation and building generational loyalty to God?¹⁰

I’ve termed my paper *Producing Generational Loyalty to God* to capture the idea that we need to consider how truth is passed from one generation to the next generation without the loss of information, but rather with the next generation building upon the information that was given them by the prior generation. The purpose of course is to build a godly subculture. Put another way, the next generation building upon the spiritual achievements of the prior generation. This pattern is evidenced in Scripture by the high civilization enjoyed in the time of Solomon. During the latter period of the Judges there were a few, albeit rare, families that focused on training their children. These children trained their children and the movement spawned strong families centered on training the next generation in loyalty to God. After three or four generations the loyalty to God worked out in tremendous blessing in every area of life as observed in the early years of King Solomon’s vast kingdom; incredible wealth, superior military weaponry replete with a naval fleet, wisdom in all the sciences, production of thousands of proverbs and songs, the Levitical choir and so forth, all achievements resulting from a series of generations learning loyalty to God, achievements that were lost in a single generation because of negative volition to the word of God. While recognizing that we are not Israel but the Church, the principles underlying the formation of Solomon’s awesome culture remain the same; learning loyalty to God through His word through family training. The Book of Proverbs repeatedly refers to the strategy that resulted in that era as one of passing truths from father to son. For example,

⁹ See Scott T. Brown, *A Weed in the Church*, (Wake Forest, NC: The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, 2011), 33-45.

¹⁰ With our nation racing toward moral, economic, political and perhaps military collapse the seriousness of the problem heightens significantly. How are the Christians of the next generation going to stand up against an enormous and radically pagan culture? We should recall the reign of King Jehoachin when Habakkuk prophesied the rapid military assault on the southern kingdom of Judah by the rising Chaldean power. It came suddenly and unexpectedly for most because they hated the word of God. But the righteous shall live by faith (context indicates a physical deliverance due to trust in YHWH’s word). As such there were a few bright lights in Babylon; Daniel in particular but his roommates Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah joined in the counter-culture as well. The fabulous record of these men’s heroic acts of faith must be seen against the backdrop of their situation. They were torn from their parents, their land and their country, marched hundreds of miles into captivity to a foreign enemy, a foreign land and a foreign country. At 15 years of age these young men stood firmly on the word of God over and against the pagan culture of the Chaldeans. How did they do it? They had learned loyalty to God amidst a corrupt generation. Who taught them? Who trained them? Godly parents who knew from Habakkuk that such a collapse was coming. Today we see a mass exodus from the church and looming collapse on the horizon and it is our responsibility to turn back to the strategy used repeatedly to curb the tide, family training. We need a new generation of Daniel’s.

Proverbs 4:1-5 states, “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.”¹¹

Training in the home as the primary means of producing generational loyalty to God and a godly culture (or subculture) is supported by four basic arguments. First, the argument from the sphere of jurisdiction under the third divine institution of family; second, the clear commands given to OT Israel; third, the clear commands given to the NT Church; and fourth, the clear preaching of many godly pastors in Church History, particularly after the Reformation. In conclusion I will suggest several advantages to family training and how the Church can help equip for family training.¹²

Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty

Charles Clough has taught that the divine institutions of responsible labor, marriage, family, human government and tribal diversity are essential to the proper ordering and function of society. He defines divine institutions as “absolute social structures instituted by God for the entire human race—believers and unbelievers alike.”¹³ This term has become for many of us an apologetic tool highlighting the contrast of God’s absolute structures with pagan attempts to recreate society by treating them as mere social conventions. This highly important insight reveals major reasons for the continued erosion of biblical culture in America.

Abraham Kuyper and others among the Dutch Reformed referred to divine institutions as spheres of sovereignty. This term highlights an oft overlooked element, namely, that each God-created social sphere, whether marriage, family or government, has a God designated sovereign responsible for that sphere. This important insight means that if any other individual or group tries to meddle in an area not under their jurisdiction then it is a violation of sphere sovereignty and there will be consequences to pay. It follows then that one of the elements in building a biblical culture is to respect these spheres of sovereignty and restore the individual or group assigned to a sphere to their responsibility.

It seems to me that the prevailing method of the church discipling the children inadvertently violates the jurisdictional boundaries of the divine institution of family. The consequence is weakening of the family, the church and the nation at large. Not surprisingly this violation is rooted in pagan philosophy. Plato recognized that the only way to create his utopian city-state was to demolish every divine institution and re-write his new world order. Regarding the family

¹¹ All Scripture citations come from *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

¹² My basic thesis is that the church needs to back away from providing so many educational opportunities to children like Sunday Schools and Youth Ministries and put its primary emphasis on encouraging and equipping fathers to train their children in the home.

¹³ Charles Clough, *A Biblical Framework for Worship and Obedience in an Age of Global Deception* (Framework Notes), Section 2, Chapter 3, 39.

he remarked in *The Republic*, “All those in the city who happen to be older than ten they will send out to the country; and taking over their children, they will rear them-far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents-in their own manners and laws that are such as we described before. And, with the city and the regime of which we were speaking thus established most quickly and easily, it will itself be happy and most profit the nation in which it comes to be.”¹⁴ If Plato realized it, Modern Greek idealists involved in educating children realize it much more. One of the fathers of modern education, Jean Jacque Rousseau, was an avid proponent of state education. Despite the fact that he abandoned all five of his own children on the doorstep of an orphanage he is considered to have written a great work on how to educate children.¹⁵ In his work *Emile* he writes, “If there are laws for adult life, there should be laws for childhood, which teach obedience to the others; and just as the reason of each man is not left to be the sole judge of his duties, so too *the education of children should not be left to their fathers’ capacities and prejudices*, especially since it is even more important to the state than to their fathers...*the state remains while the family is dissolved.*”¹⁶ [italics mine] Robert Raikes, considered by many to be the father of the Sunday School Movement, betrayed the influence of Plato and Rousseau on his philosophy when he bypassed the parents in order to reach the poor boys of Gloucester, England. Using his publication power he popularized and spread the Sunday schools. While seeming to be a beneficial thing for the poor boys who worked in the factories of England, he did not reach out to the parents in order to reach the boys but went around the parents to the boys.

As far as the third divine institution of family is concerned, when the church inadvertently borrows these ideas and asserts itself as the primary spiritual trainers of the children then a violation of sphere sovereignty has occurred and the family, church and nation suffer the consequences. Since this paper is devoted to *family* training, examples of sphere sovereignty violations in the realm of divine institution one (responsible labor)¹⁷ and two (marriage),¹⁸ are

¹⁴ Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato, Translated, with notes and an interpretive essay*. 2nd ed, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 220.

¹⁵ *Emile or On Education*.

¹⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy,” in *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Christopher Betts (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

¹⁷ The first divine institution is responsible labor or dominion (Gen 1:28; 2:15; 9:1). God created man to labor and create as He labored in creating man and nature. This labor is responsible because it will be evaluated by God (Col 3:23-25). It was originally given to the man. When a man abdicates this responsibility entirely or turns it over to a woman or the church then a violation of sphere sovereignty has occurred and disastrous consequences for economics as well as every other sphere of life including marriage, family and the nation result. Should the church encroach on a father’s responsibility to provide for his family if the father is failing to do it? If the father is failing to provide support for his family, should the church take over and fulfill the financial support for the family?¹⁷ Responsible labor for the glory of God is a non-negotiable element to stable societies. When societies lose respect for the dignity of hard work they lack creativity and efficient production and march toward economic collapse.

¹⁸ The second divine institution is marriage (Gen 1:27-28; 2:18, 24-26; 9:1). God brought the woman to the man to be a helper suitable for him. Her role was to help in furthering his dominion task. Without her it would be impossible to have dominion and spread this dominion over the face of the whole earth. The man was designed to love his wife, cherish her, nourish her and live with her in an understanding way (Eph 5:25-32; 1 Pet 3:7). The woman was designed to submit to her husband, respecting him and following his leadership (Eph 5:22-24, 33; 1 Pet 3:1-6). A violation of these roles is a violation of sphere sovereignty and will have serious consequences. Consider the recent example of women being authorized to serve on the front lines of combat. As one female soldier remarked, “The number of women that can meet the male standard will be miniscule-I’d have a decent shot according to my PFTs, but dragging a 190-pound man in full gear for 100 yards would DESTROY me-and that

not covered in the body of this paper, but are addressed in the footnotes. Nevertheless they are crucial to understand because divine institution three (family), is built upon and presupposes them.

The third divine institution is family (Gen 1:28; 9:1). This is the basic unit of society, not the individual but the family unit. God designed the family unit to extend dominion over the face of the whole earth. The father's role is to provide for his own family with the wife as his helper. Both are to train the children how to labor and spread dominion for the glory of God, bringing every thought captive to the word of God. Clearly the home is the first school and the father is responsible for the training of his children. Considering the father's duty, should the church take over the training of a father's children just because the father is failing to do it? Or should the church simply reassert his God-given duty to train his children in the home and equip him to do so? Consider a parallel situation involving divine institution one, responsible labor: should the church take over the financial support of a family just because the father is failing to do it?¹⁹ Why when it comes to financially supporting a family does the church put the responsibility back on the father, but when it comes to teaching a family's children the church takes over the responsibility? While the motive may be good, the best good we can do for the children is to reassert the father's God-given duty to train his children, equip the father with the tools to train his children and encourage him to do so.²⁰ Put another way, just as it is better to teach a man how to fish than to give him a fish, so it is better to teach a man how to teach his children than it is to do it for him.²¹

Advantages will be discussed later but the bottom line is that the training of children, when it is put exclusively or primarily in the hands of someone other than the father (or head of the household) is an idea rooted in pagan philosophy that violates sphere sovereignty.

Argument from OT Israel

The divine institution of family preceded the State by 1,700 years, Israel by 2,000 years and the Church by 4,000 years. Since the divine institution of family transcends all dispensations then we would expect the commands to the fathers regarding family training to be essentially the same in all dispensations. Surely when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in His kingdom there will still be family and the father will be responsible to train his children. This is supported by both the Old and New Testament.

miniscule number that can physically make the grade AND has the desire to go into combat will be facing an impossible situation that will ruin the combat effectiveness of the unit." see <http://hotair.com/archives/2013/01/27/some-advice-on-women-in-combat-from-a-female-veteran/> When societies lose sight of the distinct roles of men and women, violations of sphere sovereignty result at every turn and both men and women are put in impossible situations they were not designed to handle.

¹⁹ The matter of temporal benevolence for a needy family is another matter altogether.

²⁰ This does not preclude having vacation bible schools, summer camps or other occasional church sponsored educational opportunities. It simply means that the father is the one who is given this jurisdictional duty and must take it up or face serious consequences.

²¹ Adapted from a Chinese Proverb.

Abraham in Genesis 18. Genesis 18:17-19 teaches that one of God’s prescribed means for bringing about the fulfillment of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant was that Abraham train his children and his household to keep God’s ways by doing righteousness and justice.²² Therefore the ultimate and certain fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant depends on family training in the home. “The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,¹⁸ since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?¹⁹“For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” Verse 18 shows the certainty of the Abrahamic Covenant being fulfilled, verse 19 shows that family training is the means by which it will be fulfilled. The Hebrew verb “command” in verse 19 is *sawa* and means “intensively instruct.” Abraham was to intensively instruct his children and his household. If this condition is not met then the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant will not be fulfilled. Ultimately, because of the unconditional nature of the covenant this condition will be met. Family training is therefore at the heart of God’s prescribed means of fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant to the nation Israel and bringing in the kingdom.

Jacob in Genesis 35. How did the family training program go? Not so well according to Genesis 35. After just two generations the family was apostate. Jacob was not training his family to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. His family was worshipping foreign gods in the household. So in verse 1 “God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.’” They were to go worship God. But there was a problem because everyone in the family had their little idols and you can’t rightly go up and worship God with all those little idols. So verse 2, what does he do? “Jacob said to his household, “Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments;³ and let us arise and go up to Bethel...” Jacob took charge spiritually. He took the spiritual reins of his family and he said get those idols out of the house. Today it might be all the little iPods or video games, whatever the little idols are that the kids are running around with in the house, tools that take over their entire life. If the father stands up and says, that’s it, get ’em out of here, we’re going to worship God, he’d be taking the spiritual reins. Jacob took the spiritual reins in verse 4 and “they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in the ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.” He couldn’t rightly expect God to bless them under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant while they were worshipping idols. So he took spiritual leadership and got rid of that stuff. What immediately follows in verse 5? God began to bless them. “As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.” So now God is going to protect and bless them because Jacob stepped up as the spiritual leader in the home. If they had gone out without throwing all the idols out they would have been destroyed by these people. Verse 6, “So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel),” and the short story is they worshipped God, it pleased God and in verses 9 and following what happened because this man took up the spiritual leadership in his family? God blessed them. Further enjoyment of blessing and God re-confirms in verses 11 and 12 the Abrahamic Covenant first made to Abraham.

²² An unconditional covenant can have conditions within it that are necessary to enjoy the blessing. Gen 17 shows that circumcision was a condition necessary to enter into the covenant and enjoy blessing, otherwise you were cut off.

Israel in Exodus 12. By this time, for over 400 years they'd been down in Egypt, God was setting them free because the people were crying out and God sent a deliverer, Moses. On that last night as they set foot to leave Egypt, to be separated from paganism, God insisted an ordinance be kept throughout every generation to be led by the father in the home, the feast of Passover. In verse 21, you are to take a lamb according to the family. "Then Moses called for all elders of Israel and said to them to "go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families and slay the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. And none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning." Why? "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the Destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you." They were to follow these very strict instructions. And then notice verses 24-28, this was given to be an everlasting teaching device in the Jewish home for the father. "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. And it will come about when you enter the land which the Lord will give you as He promised that you shall observe this rite and it will come about that when your children say to you, 'Daddy, what does this rite mean to you?' that you shall say, it is a Passover sacrifice to YHWH who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians," blew them to pieces, it's a lovely lesson for young ones. God blew them up! He destroyed them and Egypt utterly. "But He spared our homes and the people bowed low and they worshipped." So this teaching device was given to the father to be observed in the family as a reminder. Every year as Passover was kept the child would say, "What's going on, Daddy, why are we doing this?" Because of what God did in history for our nation. That is why we are doing this. It's a reminder that God judged our enemies but He saved us. Why do we need to remember? Why do we need these pedagogical devices? Because we're prone to forget. But if we keep it up we remember, generation after generation we remember. What does this produce? Generational loyalty to God. Generational loyalty. Generation after generation after generation remembering.

Moses in Deuteronomy 6. In Deut 6 we have probably what most consider the central text on family training in the home. I consider it the most extensive but it falls right in line with what we've seen before beginning in Gen 18, family training as a means of enjoying the promised blessing under the Abrahamic Covenant. In Deut 6:1-3 we have the necessity of obedience to enjoy the blessing of God in the land. "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, ²so that you and your son and your grandson," see, it's generational, not just one generation, multiple generations, "might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged," there's blessing. Verse 3, "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly," there's more blessing, population growth is a blessing in the Scriptures and a population dearth is a cursing. He continues, "just as the Lord the God of your fathers has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey." This was for Israel. In verses 4 to 5 he says that this is what must transmit through the family, the idea that there is one God the family is to worship. "Here, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" And verse 5 is what that family is to do. "You shall

love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” That is loyalty, they are to learn loyalty to the one true God.

Verses 6, 7, 8 and 9 tell the fathers how to transfer loyalty to God in the family setting. How does it get transferred to the next generation? Verse 6, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.” Where does the word of God have to go? On your heart, your mind, the thinking center of man. How is it going to get there? Verse 7 is the key; “You [fathers, cf v 2], shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” There are two types of training in verse 7. First, formal training, “you shall teach them diligently.” This is formal training in the word of God, Bible study. The verb “teach diligently” is a word that refers to sharpening a sword, the repetitive motion of sharpening so in the context refers to a repetitive training of the children in the word of God. Second, informal training, “you shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” In other words, you’re taking the things that you’ve learned in formal, repetitive training and you’re applying it to all the details of life. All day long, an ongoing theological conversation amongst the members of the family. Verse 8, “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gate.” You have to be saturated in the word of God to the point that it’s second nature. Why? Because Satan is busy bombarding you with the word of man. So the father has to train, train, train the children in the home so the word of God gets into the heart, heart, heart. Train when you get up, train when you lie down, train as you walk by the way, utilizing those teachable moments, being intentional in all things. The father has to be the one who takes the lead if Israel was to enjoy the blessing. Verses 10-11 go into the supernatural blessing Israel would enjoy if the fathers did this. Did they do it? No. Verse 12, “watch yourselves, that you do not” do what? “forget,” “forget the Lord who brought you out from the land of Egypt and out of the house of slavery.” Because if you forget verse 15 tells you what’s going to happen. “For the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.” All the cursings. So this is God’s explanation to Israel for how to enjoy blessing and avoid cursing and it all centers on verse 7, the Fathers sharpening their children in the word of God, training in the home was and remains essential to Israel enjoying the covenant blessings.

Asaph in Psalm 78. Asaph was a reformer in his time. He was considering Israel’s catastrophic failures and he traced it back to one problem. What was that one problem? Fathers had failed to do what God said to do in Deut 6, train their children in the home as they got up and as they walked by the way and so forth. In verse 1 he gives an exhortation to pay attention. “Listen, oh my people, to my instruction, incline your ears to the words of my mouth. ²I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, ³Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. ⁴We will not conceal them from our children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.” The training revolves around who God is and what God has done, the great events of history. Verse 5, “For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children.” What passage does Asaph have in mind there in verse 5? Deut 6. Why do the fathers have to teach their children? Verse 6, “That the generation to come might know, even the children to be born, That they may arise and tell them

to their children,” that’s what I mean by generational loyalty, the transfer of Scriptural content from one generation to the next generation. This important concept runs through the whole OT. What do they want to transfer to the next generation? Verse 7, “that they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God But keep His commandments.” What will happen if the father doesn’t teach this? The next generation will forget. It only takes one generation to forget; it takes several generations to build, but just one to forget. And we wonder why our children leave the church and go create chaos in society. Maybe it’s because we didn’t train them in the home but we abdicated our responsibility to someone else to do it, someone who had them for two hours a week. Nothing against that person, it’s just that there is no substitute for daily sharpening in the word and daily application to all the details of life. Verse 8 shows that Asaph was calling for reform, “And not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not prepare its heart And whose spirit was not faithful to God.” That’s what Asaph saw and his solution was to get back to family training. Ps 78 is probably the most accurate commentary on where fathers are in the church today. They are that stubborn and rebellious generation that is not training their family in the home. Consequently we have an entire generation of people whose hearts are not prepared and whose spirits are not faithful to God. The answer is fathers need to wake up and teach their children so they can change the course.

Elijah in Malachi 4. Malachi is the seal of the prophets. He wrote during the times of the Gentiles and he reminds Israel that the day of the LORD is coming and in that day of fiery judgments the remnant will be divided from the non-remnant; the non-remnant will be destroyed and the remnant will enter into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. But how will it happen? How will the Abrahamic Covenant be fulfilled? We learned from Gen 18 it would occur by means of fathers training their children. Well who is going to restore that ministry? Verse 4, “Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.” Who’s going to remind them? Verse 5, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”⁶ “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” Elijah is going to have a ministry to fathers such that the father’s hearts will be restored to their children and what will happen to the hearts of the children? They will be restored to their fathers. The father is the most important influence in a child’s life and all the father has to do is turn to the child and the child will turn to him. God designed it that way. And when Elijah comes he will minister with that principle in mind, to the fathers first, then the children will follow; none of the Platonic bypassing of the fathers.

The summary of the Old Testament is that God has commanded the fathers to train their children in the home so as to secure the ultimate blessing in the land. The last verse of the OT says that when Elijah comes he will be successful in this ministry and then the kingdom will come. This is because the family is a transdispensational feature of God’s plan for history.

Argument from the NT Church

The family precedes the Church by 4,000 years. Since the family is transdispensational then nothing changes so far as the jurisdictional sphere of the father in the NT Church. Ours are not the covenants, the washings, the ceremonies, et. al., but ours is eternal life and the abundant life

(John 10:10). John's gospel teaches that we can have eternal life now, a radical new dimension of eternal life beyond Jewish thought; but John also reveals that for those who possess eternal life now there is the possibility of abundant life available for those who abide in Him by abiding in His word (John 15:1-11). Surely the word is central to enjoying our eternal life. Surely it is the husband/father in the home who is the central human figure in exposing the household to the word both in word and deed. In the parallel passage of Ephesians 5:15-6:9 Paul directly makes this linkage by teaching that if we are wise we will walk by means of the Spirit and then makes application of what this looks like in the mundane spheres of life; marriage (5:22-32), family (6:1-4) and labor (6:5-9), three areas which *just happen to be* the first three divine institutions. In any case it should be clear that the enjoyment of the eternal life that we possess is largely related to whether or not the head of the home is fulfilling his responsibility.²³

Fathers and Children in Ephesians 6:4. Paul is quite clear as to the father's responsibility, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The first part is a negative. Do not provoke. Extensive study of this statement shows that it means don't compare your kids with other kids. This only exasperates the child because your attitude is that they do not measure up. This generates animosity and when the children grow up they leave home and hate you.²⁴ The second part contrasts with a positive, "but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." "Discipline" refers to physical correction or discipline. When children are young, without a lot of reasoning skills, the father should give a simple explanation and use the rod to physically discipline. "Instruction" refers to verbal correction or discipline. When children grow older the father should use the rod less often and the verbal correction through reasoning skills based on Scripture more often. This passage clearly commands the father to actively engage in training his children in the word of God at home. The simple reason is to promote generational loyalty to God.

A Believing Mother Only in 1 Corinthians 7:14. What if there is no father or the father is an unbeliever? 1 Cor 7:14 answers that it should be carried out by the mother. Many of the Corinthians that came to Christ were now in mixed marriages because their spouse did not come to Christ. Some of them thought divorce was the best action. Paul thought otherwise, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." The believer in the home has a sanctifying effect in the sense that this believer is the linkage to both the unbelieving spouse and the child. At least the one believing parent can train the child in the home. This is better than the child having no believing parent. An example of a child with one believing parent is Timothy. Timothy's father was a Greek unbeliever, but his mother Eunice was a Jewish believer. She and Timothy's grandmother Lois both trained Timothy in the word of

²³ As far as the husband's responsibility to the wife, he is to cleanse his wife by washing her in the water of the word. The washing is to produce a cleansing, purifying righteousness in the home; the very place it is most difficult to do because of habituation and the fact that no one sees you...except...God! We should remember the lesson from Moses who looked left and looked right but not up before he struck the Egyptian. The husband must constantly be looking up in order to fulfill his spiritual duty to his wife in the home. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 confirms these thoughts by teaching that if a wife has a theological question that is a good thing, but she should ask her husband at home. This implies that he is teaching her in the home what the scriptures say and mean.

²⁴ Some think Paul's father did something like this to him when he returned from rabbinic school in Jerusalem a Christian and that he was therefore writing out of his own experience with his father.

God. 1 Timothy 3:14, “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Finally, we can see that Paul did not go around the family to reach the children as did Raikes and other Platonic thinkers who wanted to undermine the family. In several NT cases Peter and Paul evangelized entire households of people starting with the leader of the household and what happened? The entire household believed. Remember Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44)? Remember Sosthenes (cp 1 Cor 1:2 with Acts 18:17)? Remember Crispus (Acts 18:8)? Remember the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31-34)? Why bypass the father to get to the children when you can go straight to the father and have the entire family come to Christ? Then the kids are in an environment where the father, the mother or both are believers. This is not to say there ought to be a total exclusion of children’s outreach like CEF or VBS. It’s just that evangelizing families is attested numerous times in the NT and yet is rarely thought of today. Considering the fragmentation of the family in America, the farther the family declines the more opportunities for family evangelism will occur as people become very attracted to stable, thriving families. In the end, if we want to enjoy the eternal life we possess to the utmost, then we will implement family training in the home.

Argument from Church History

In the first five centuries Christian fathers were told that they need to go home and train their children. In the 6th century Roman Catholicism gave rise to the doctrine of the priesthood which said that only the priest could understand the Bible. With this doctrine at hand and Latin dying as a spoken language family training in the home passed from the scene. Only small pockets of believers still thought it was the father’s responsibility to teach the Bible in the home. This situation sadly remained until the 16th century Reformation. Since the Reformation was a “back to the Bible” movement, the Reformers who came out of the Roman Catholic Church read that fathers were supposed to be teaching the Bible in their homes. They therefore started producing literature that would help the fathers take on this role again. An example is the document John Huss produced, the *Bohemia*, which outlines some basic things the father was to teach in the home. Martin Luther wrote a short catechism and at the head of each section, it says “As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.”²⁵ The Westminster Shorter Catechism is another publication that helped fathers train their children in the home.²⁶ The father was to go through the question/answer format in the training of his children. The production of prep school material and training curriculum is just as vital now as it was then. With our distinctive emphasis on the grammatical-historical-contextual approach to the Bible and it’s resultant dispensationalism, it is important that we produce these materials. However, rather than using them in church in Sunday school programs we might be far more effective in training our fathers how to use the material and repeatedly encouraging them to fulfill their duty and use of it in the home.

²⁵ <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php>

²⁶ <http://www.shortercatechism.com/>

In application of this, the first settlers of Salem who came to our country made an enlarged covenant in 1636, “Promising also unto our best ability to teach our children and servants the knowledge of God and of his will that they may serve him also.”²⁷ They saw it as a necessary means of building generational loyalty to God. Richard Baxter, a great pastor of the 1600’s, a remarkable individual that Christ has given His church, says on this issue, “The husband must be the principal teacher of the family, he must instruct them, examine them, and rule them about manners of God.”²⁸ Matthew Henry, author of the devotional commentary on the Old and New Testaments says, “Masters of the family must go before their households in the things of God. As such, they must keep up the family doctrine, family worship and family discipline.”²⁹ How important is it that we don’t lose sight of the fact that we must lead from the front! The Synod of Philadelphia, convened in 1733 to discuss the problem of declining godliness. Their solution: “To all our Ministers and Members: Take particular care about our visiting families and press family and secret worship”,³⁰ the key was what is happening in the home, family worship. George Whitfield, during the Great Awakening in the 1800’s had this to say “We must for ever despair of seeing a primitive spirit of piety revived in the world until we are so happy to see a revival of family religion.”³¹ The home is the key. Jonathan Edwards, in one of two farewell sermons, wrote, “Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace, if these fail in the home all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.”³² Remarkable statement from a man who was arguably the greatest mind America has ever produced. After quoting Joshua, who declared to all Israel, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (24:15), A. W. Pink said, “Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty: all other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. The head of the house is the one to lead the devotions, but if he be absent, or seriously ill, or an unbeliever, then the wife would take his place. Under no circumstances should family worship be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family, then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer. . . . It is then that the little ones will receive their first impressions and form their initial conceptions of the Lord God.”³³ In J. C. Ryle’s four directives to Christian parents he says many things, one of which is, “I suspect we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious Gospel. They see far more of these things than we suppose. Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.”³⁴ And Rev Oliver Heywood in his work on decaying religion in society says, “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 passeth on to relatives, and lesser spheres of relationship make up greater: churches and commonwealths consist of families.”³⁵ He goes on to say the chief remedy for godlessness in a culture is family training in the home.

²⁷ <http://www.salemstate.edu/academics/schools/5556.php>

²⁸ <http://covenantfamily.nfshost.com/bhbfw.html>

²⁹ <http://covenantfamily.nfshost.com/mhfr.html>

³⁰ <http://covenantfamily.nfshost.com/bhbfw.html>

³¹ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/the-christian-family/great-duty-of-family-religion-by-rev-george-whitefield/>

³² <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.txt>

³³ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/the-christian-family/family-worship-by-a-w-pink/>

³⁴ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/the-christian-family/duties-christian-parents-ryle/>

³⁵ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/the-christian-family/a-remedy-for-decaying-religion-by-rev-oliver-heywood/>

It seems abundantly obvious from all counts that the word of God must hold a central place in the home. And yet it was a problem in Israel and it is a problem in the Church. But since it is under the sphere of sovereignty allotted to the father, then the Church should not get in the way by providing so much education for children that the father's are tempted to abdicate the spiritual education of their children to the Church. As pastor Thomas Burns, one of the pastors in Scotland in 1798 warned, "My great objection to Sunday schools is that I am afraid they will, in the end, destroy all family religion. Whatever has tendency to do this, I consider it as my duty to guard you against."³⁶ Instead of focusing our ministries on educating children we ought to focus on equipping fathers to carry out their duties in the home. To aid them we should develop excellent materials and then train them how to use them. In this way I think you will find there are many advantages.

Advantages

While there are many advantages to emphasizing family training five are notable. First, it exposes them to more time in the word. A father training his children at home can engage them in doctrine every day. This repetition is far superior to allotting two or three hours a week at Church. Surely if faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17) then training in the home will more quickly strengthen the faith of the entire family.

Second, it maximizes capitalization of the natural life setting. A father training his children amidst the normal course of life in the home setting is ripe for providential teaching moments. Real life situations are far superior to any we can arrange in a classroom. When these occur and the father or mother capitalizes, the child sees that the Bible applies to every area of life and they tend not to develop the bad habit of compartmentalizing truth into a religious box.

Third, it begins a theological conversation in the home, a lost art. If the word of God is taught in the home on a daily basis then theological conversation becomes a natural part of life. The benefits of this are extraordinary in that each member of the family is familiarized with a vast array of knowledge as well as questions that develop curiosity for the text and point to the interconnectedness of all of God's reality.

Fourth, it generates close, open fellowship between parents and children. If the word of God is central in the home then the problem of peer pressure and peer advice is minimized since the fellowship between parents and children is optimized due to exposure to the word of God and respect for parental authority. This further creates an openness between parents and children rather than hiding.

Fifth, it gives them a model for training their children. If the parents train the children daily in the word then the children will be set up for following that model with their own children. The model shows the children that it is important to the parents. Diligent pursuit of training is how discipleship happens in the home and this is how generational loyalty to God is developed and

³⁶ J. Henry Harris, *Robert Raikes: The Man and His Work* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1899), 98.

propagated to build a subculture that is a powerful testimony to the word of God. Without this crucial piece of the puzzle the tendency of the next generation will be to forget the word of God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are four basic arguments for the high priority of family training in the home. First, the argument from divine institutions as absolute structures assigning a jurisdictional sphere and a party responsible for that sphere. Since the home was the first school then it follows that the father is the one primarily responsible for the teaching of all the members of his household. He may delegate certain training but he is responsible for this duty. Second, since the family is transdispensational the argument from the OT shows repeatedly that the father is responsible for the training of his household. Third, the argument from the NT is essentially the same as the OT, the father is responsible for training the members of his household. Finally the argument from pastors of Church History, particularly from the Reformation time shows that godly pastors recognized that the answer to declining godliness in society is a restoration of family worship. The advantages are many-fold. Therefore, the course of action that pastor-teachers should take is to produce materials that can aid fathers in training their children in the home, training in how to use the materials, encouragement to take up this mighty responsibility and continued equipping through high-quality content Bible teaching.

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