

The Church that is within Thy House

Scriptural Basis

First of all, examining the scriptural basis for the title of this presentation, we find that it is a common theme in both the Old and the New Testament. Joshua told the children of Israel, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh 24:15)

Jesus healed the son of a noble man by His word and he believed. "So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house." (John 4:53)

Throughout the Acts of the apostles Luke records many instances of how entire households received the grace of repentance. The centurion Cornelius received the grace of repentance along with all those people in his house. "And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." (Acts H: 13 & 14)

Paul wrote to Philemon, "And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house." (Philem. 1:2)

As is evident throughout the scriptures, the kingdom of God has remained the same. The core of the teaching starts in the congregation that is in the home. From the lives of the Old Testament saints through to the New Testament time, the spirit has taught the same. God blesses through the work done in the congregation that is within one's own house.

God's Establishment of the Family

God created a helpmate for man because it was not good for him to be alone. Moses recorded in Gen 2: 18, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

As God created the family, so He also set the positions and roles in it. It is not by chance that each of us is in the station of life that we are in. God established the family to bless it and bless the work done through it. Each family member has an important role to play in the work of the family.

And I would add here, to those who do not have a personal family, you are still members of the larger family of God. Your role in the congregation is critical to the work and the progress

of the gospel. You serve in the local congregation, in Sunday schools, Bible classes and at camps. God blesses your efforts.

Roles in the Family Are Based on the example of Jesus

Each of us finds ourselves to be corrupt and sinful. That is why we need the guidance of the Spirit of God to help us to humble ourselves to serve. We need to serve as congregation members, as parents and as children. We need to serve in many ways both temporal and spiritual. For example, in our modern society, the idea of sacrifice and service for the good of the family often is lacking. It has become all too common a news item to see children neglected by their own mother. A parent may become so entangled in sin either through alcoholism, drugs or the addiction of gambling, among other things, that they do not provide the basic necessities for their children. Also, we have all seen the increase in desires for the goods of this world that leads to living beyond one's means or to laziness in doing the basic chores required of a parent at home. Such temporal neglect may even cause a parent to have to answer to a court of law for their negligence.

There are very serious consequences that result from neglecting the temporal needs of children. Such neglect is an indication of spiritual neglect. It is a much more serious issue. Spiritual responsibility is the duty given by God. If a parent falls into spiritual neglect it has eternal consequences. In the same way that it is difficult to get the children to participate in the work at home, if mother and father are not also pitching in, so also the spiritual example of mother and father are very powerful teachers. For such teaching we turn to our Savior and His example of love. As the example of Christ is the best teacher for all of us, so also the best teacher for the children is the example of the parents.

It is important to remember the reason the family has been established. The household is not set up for fulfilling the wants of the parents, rather everything is done for the good of the growing generation.

God blessed the family. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth..." (Gen 1:27-28)

God blessed the family for a purpose. It is His blessing for bringing souls to heaven. It is a holy and difficult duty. It requires a life of service and self-sacrifice.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:5-8)

Jesus taught His own disciples, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:10)

The family is founded on the word of God and rooted in love. It requires love, humility, sacrifice and much effort. The Spirit of God teaches that the best foundation for the family is one based on love. Paul writes, "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." (Rom 12:9 & 10)

As Paul teaches, the best of competitions is to compete in seeing who can show the greater respect for the other. When this is the spirit in the home, then there is not a battle of wills or a wrong competition to see who can avoid the most work.

The Apostle Paul describes the relationship between husband and wife:

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:21-25)

Just as the congregation of God is a level headed flock, so also it is at home. There the example of Christ is brought forth as the best home teacher. Both mother and father are responsible for the upbringing of their children. Both are responsible for the welfare of the home and the family. As members of the royal priesthood of the Holy Spirit, both husband and wife are responsible for teaching and preaching the gospel. The position of the husband is not one of special privileges or authority but rather one of looking after the spiritual needs of the family. Just as Christ came, not to be served, but to serve. So also, a father must serve his family in word, deed and especially by example in both a temporal and spiritual sense. He carries the responsibility to God to be the shepherd of the flock that God has given to him.

Parental Responsibility

Dear parents, Luther has stated this issue very straight forwardly, saying that God has commanded you to control your child. He continues on, saying that parents possess great but limited authority.

For it is the duty of father and mother – nay, for this very purpose they were made father and mother by God – to teach children and lead them to God, not according to their own notion and their own religious persuasion but according to the command of God.

Religious Training of Children is a Sacred Duty

He has given and entrusted children to us that we should train and govern them according to His will; otherwise he would have no need of father and mother. Let everyone know, therefore, that it is his duty, on peril of losing the divine favor, to bring up his children above all things in the fear and knowledge of God and, if they are talented, to let them learn and study so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

Dear parents, teach your children the fear of God.

Teach children that the word of God is the highest authority for life and values.

The Apostle James writes, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:25-27)

Dear fathers and mothers, it is important that the faith of the heart brings forth the fruits that testify of it. If there is incongruence between the confession of the lips and the deeds of our children, we must deal with it straight forwardly and not let the gospel be used as a cover for sin. This does not mean we rush to proclaim a child out of faith when he has fallen or is under heavy doubts. Rather we hasten with the fire of the gospel to heal, strengthen and forgive.

Role of Children

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph 6:1-4)

Luther expounds at length on the differences between loving and honoring. He especially teaches children the necessity of honoring their parents.

Do more than Love Parents; Honor Them

To this estate of fatherhood and motherhood God has given the distinction above all lower estates that He commands us not only to love our parents but also to honor them. For concerning brothers, sisters and our neighbors in general He commands nothing higher than that we love them. In this way He sets father and mother apart, distinguishes them above all other persons on earth, and places them at His side. For to honor a person is a far higher matter than to love him; because honor does not comprise love alone but also deference, humility and awe, as if we were in the presence of majesty there hidden. Nor does honor require that we merely address parents kindly and reverently, but also both in our hearts and in our actions, we show and make it clear that we esteem them highly and next to God, consider them supreme. For one whom we are sincerely to honor we must truly consider exalted and important. Therefore we must train young people to look upon their parents as God's representatives and to remember that even though they are lowly, poor, frail and peculiar, they are still the father and mother whom God gave them. They are not to be robbed of their honor because of their conduct and failings. Therefore we are not to look at the kind of persons they are but at God's will, which has made and ordained it so. In other respects we are, of course, all alike in the eyes of God. (Luther)

Rearing Our Children

Luther says to use Evangelical Discipline. The entire gospel is required in the work of rearing. Paul wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim 3:16 -17)

Evangelical Discipline means we need to discipline with a great amount of forgiveness. It means we must teach, rebuke, correct and forgive. Each of us is responsible for setting the priorities in our own homes. What is the most important in our families? Is Jesus the Lord of our homes? There where the spirit and mind of Christ rules, there the gospel is readily used.

Nevertheless, as a result of our own sin corruption, it is very easy for the raising of our children to begin to go awry.

Authoritarian

If the discipline approach is authoritarian, it is dictatorial. This can lead to eye service by the children. It may cause service and obeisance out of fear instead of honor and respect. The bond of love and trust between parent and child is not established. The control of the child is based on absolute rule. It may lead to a heart estranged from his parents because of the lack of understanding and empathy. Do not crush a child. The apostle does not mean to say that children are not to be rebuked or disciplined, but that they are to be chastised in love.

Lenient leads to permissiveness of sin

"Do not coddle children. The first destroyers of their own children are those who neglect them and knowingly permit them to grow up without the training and admonition of the Lord. Even if they do not harm them by a bad example, they still destroy them by yielding to them. ... These parents will, therefore, bear the sins of their children because they make these sins their own."

This is how Luther stated this issue and he continued, What is it but to sacrifice and burn one's own child in honor of an idol, when parents train their children more for the sake of the world than for the sake of God? They let them go their own way and be burned up by worldly pleasure, love, happiness, possessions, and honor, while the love and honor of God and the desire for eternal blessing are extinguished in them.

The example of the high priest Eli from the Old Testament is a strikingly warning example of the results of leniency. "For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." (1 Sam 3:13&14)

A Conflicting environment results if the parents have a differing approach to raising their children.

This is very injurious to the spiritual and psychological health of the children. It is very important that parents have a common approach and understanding on setting rules, boundaries and discipline. If they do not, it creates conflict in the children and they will grow up with a confused view of the world and values for life. Also they will use one parent against the other.

Not Overly Spiritual. As believers, we travel here with our hearts in heaven but our feet on the earth.

The purpose of all of these teachings is not to create some perfect model that no one can accomplish. We are all of the earth and earthly. We cannot make this body of ours holy. The children of God travel with their feet firmly planted on the earth but their hearts are in heaven. God only requires of each of us a willing heart and mind. We attempt our best according to the measure of faith and gifts He has given us. If we open our mouths, He has promised to fill it with His goodness.

Proper Balance

There is a proper balance between the authoritarian and lenient approach. It is called authoritative. The parents take the role and responsibility that God has placed them in with all seriousness. It means you will need to differentiate between being decisive without being dictatorial. You will need to be in control without being autocratic. You must, dear mothers and fathers, establish the boundaries and rules of your own households. You must be disciplined and at the same time flexible. Seek for advice from the more experienced parents in Zion. They have much good advice for many everyday problems as well as for the more difficult situations.

God provides the pattern (Luther)

In the same way as we experience the care of God, so we should care for our children. God may suffer affliction to surround us and chastise us but He also consoles, strengthens, confirms, nourishes and favors us. And, of course, in spite of the multitude of our sins, He does not condemn us, but rather, when we are repentant, He forgives us all our sins.

Finally, some characteristics we all would like to see in our homes.

Boundaries

Father and mother must be the ones who are setting the boundaries. Our children need love and boundaries. This creates a secure environment for growth and development.

"These things write I unto thee...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth." (1 Tim 3:14 & 15)

Love, Honor, Respect

Everyone needs appreciation. Everyone needs to grow with a positive feeling of self worth. If everyone in the world grew up being loved, honored and respected would we have the measure of problems with broken families, violence and sin that we have today?

Service

The example of Christ sets the measure for each of us. It creates a mind and a desire to deny oneself, to sacrifice, to help and to serve.

Forgiveness

Parents set the environment which encourages open communications. It permits the expression of varying opinions. It creates the expectation that each has the right to discuss any and all issues in an atmosphere of honesty and respect. Criticism, correction and even rebuke are often necessary but are done concentrating on the deed without denigrating the individual. It encourages the use of confession and the application of the gospel freely for the correction of errors and faults. It gives strength for the endeavor as a child of God.

As the children grow, they develop their own opinions. Parents need to keep the lines of communication open to foster a spirit of openness and trust so that even difficult issues can be discussed.

Home Services

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jer 6:16)

In spite of all manner of doctrines and philosophies from the wise of our time, the word of God has not changed. It still instructs, leads and guides in the one, the only and the best way. It is the narrow way which leads to life eternal.

Dear parents, preach the gospel. Ask for the gospel from each other and from your children. When errors come, when you find yourself reacting in the flesh instead of in the spirit, set up the altar of grace. There poor parents and children can find mercy and forgiveness. There each of us receives new strength to continue on as a child of God. The gospel is the power of God onto salvation for all who believe. (Rom 1:16)

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah was assured that the blessing of God would come. God will lead the way to victory. God will bless the work. It will not succeed because of our own labors but only because of the blessing of the spirit of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Zech. 4:6)

God Himself Must Bless the Up-bringing

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