

Being Faithful With the Blessing of Children

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Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:1-4)

A piece of the truth, turned into whole cloth, can produce some ugly garments. While it is generally a good thing that a lot of Christians have rediscovered the biblical teaching concerning the blessing of having many children—“*Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them*” (Ps. 127:5)—nevertheless, more is not *always* better. “*Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble*” (Prov. 15:16). Sheer quantity is not a replacement for quality, and “*to whom much is given, from him much will be required*” (Luke 12:48). We do not want to be like the couple who had twin sons and jokingly said, “We gave them biblical names: Jacob and Satan.” It is essential that our children, regardless of how many we have, become blessings and not curses to our households, the church and the world.

When God called Abraham, and promised him great blessings, including the promise to make him a blessing to the nations of the world, it was a *conditional* promise (Gen. 12:1-3). God did not tell Abraham that He would bring all these blessings to pass no matter what Abraham did, but rather God predicated these blessings on Abraham’s faith, which was to be demonstrated by his works. God reiterates his promise to Abraham in Genesis 18 and then reveals the conditions for the promised blessings: “*...and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him*” (Gen. 18:18-19). If, *and only if*, Abraham faithfully commanded his children and household to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, would God make the children of Abraham a blessing to the world. This *conditional promise* is true for every household.

Simply being born into a covenant Christian household has never been and never will be sufficient to secure the promised blessings of God. So, what advantage is there to being born in a covenant household? The apostle Paul answers with a resounding, “*Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God*” (Rom. 3:2). It is no small advantage to be born into a family where the Bible is present. Yet there is a dramatic difference in *having* the word of God in our households and in *diligently teaching* that word to our children (Deut. 6:7). If you are seriously ill, living in a hospital offers tremendous advantages. Yet, if the doctors and nurses in that hospital are incompetent or lazy, and do not apply the available remedies to the patient, the advantage has become a curse. When our children sin, and of course they will sin, we must be ready and eager to apply the word of God to them with all its power—to expose and root out the corruption as well as to bring about the

necessary healing remedy. Nineteenth century American theologian, Robert L. Dabney expounds on this point:

These then are two facts which give so unspeakable a solemnity to the parent's relation to his children. He has conferred on them, unasked, the endowment of an endless, responsible existence. He has also been the instrument—if the unwilling, yet the sole instrument—of conveying to this new existence the taint of original sin and guilt. Can the human mind conceive a motive more tender, more dreadful, more urgent, prompting a parent to seek, for the beloved souls he has poisoned, the aid of the great Physician? . . .How can you O Christian! Fail to bring your child to the great Physician of souls, to be healed of the deadly contagion you have conveyed to him?¹

God has provided us with some unhappy examples of failures to keep covenant with Him. If we let our children grow head-strong, and if we grow afraid of insisting that they comply completely with our instruction, then we have abdicated in our responsibility and have given them up to ruin—covenant curses are all that remain. Do you remember the sad story of Adonijah the son of Haggith? In 1 Kings 1:6 we read, “*And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, ‘Why have you done so?’ . . .*” God brought that spoiled son to an untimely and a terrible end. And even in the case of the priest Eli, we read: “*In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever*” (1 Sam. 3:12-14).

God spoke through the prophet Malachi and chastised His people who had become unfaithful in their duty and responsibility to produce godly children. They were still producing children, *but not the right kind of children*. Specifically, husbands were being unfaithful to their wives and children and corrupting the covenant household. God warned the He would soon bring judgment if His people did not repent:

*Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? **He seeks godly offspring.** Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (Mal. 2:14-15).*

God then closes this last book of the Old Testament with conditional promises of blessing and curse:

¹ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions*, Vol. I, “Parental Responsibilities,” (Sprinkle Publications, Harrisonburg, VA: 1982), pp. 680-681.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:4-6).

If there is not repentance for this covenant-breaking, God promises swift and severe and judgment—curses on the individuals and upon the land, leaving them “*neither root nor branch.*” “...*lest I come and smite the land with a curse.*” Notice also that the specific requirement was to “*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*” As Abraham was to command his children and household to “*command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.*” So, we must understand that the law is the *perfect* expression of that very justice and righteousness he was to teach. Joshua 1:8: “*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth...*” Love for God is expressed by keeping His law, as Jesus said, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). It is not some vague or sentimental standard that God requires when it comes to covenant household. It is His word, and His word alone that is to provide the our instruction:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood [infancy] you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

In the opening of the New Testament (Luke 1:17) an angel tells Zacharias that his son, John the Baptist, would be that prophet, Elijah, who would “*turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.*” It is clear that household fidelity is at the heart of the work of the gospel. When men and women are converted to Christ, the primary place where the power of the redemptive work should be seen is in the restoration (i.e., redemption), of the covenant household. The family relationships are set in order according to the pattern of God’s word. Not only do fathers (and mothers as their husband’s covenant companion), focus their affection and attention toward the godly raising of their children, but also the children come to have their hearts affectionately directed toward their godly parents.

At the very heart of God’s redemptive covenant [the Covenant of Grace] is the relationship between fathers and their children. This is not a footnote to God’s plan for His people. It is not only central to the immediate work of God in the lives of individuals and families. It is vital to the long-term perpetuation of the kingdom of God from generation to generation. And it is vital to a godly and healthy society.

Fathers turn their hearts toward their children when they have their best interest, both physically and spiritually, as the highest priority. In other words, by always seeking their good, even at their own expense—becoming servants even as our Lord served His disciples, and sacrificing to see them progress before God. This is an attitude that must permeate the relationship—this is grace. It is seen not simply in following the letter of the law i.e. performing some list of duties in a mechanical way, but also by pouring our affection and showing genuine interest in their lives. When we are driven by such unselfish motives so as to always seek their benefit at every level, then we faithfully imitate our heavenly Father. We will know their needs, and move to meet them even before they ask. Of course, seeking their ultimate good involves making the word of God *central* in our life and home (Deut. 6:6-9).

Father's, our hearts are turned toward our children when we recognize that our duty to God extends beyond ourselves and to our children and our children's children—when the vision of our own lives transcends the moment and extends into the future. Fathers, more than any one else, have the opportunity to change the world. We will know the ultimate covenant blessing in this life when we see our children marry committed believers and establish new covenant households and raise up our grandchildren to the glory of God.

Our hearts are turned toward our children when we fulfill our duties toward them—teaching, training and disciplining them first, by our words—teaching the Scriptures “*diligently*” to our children. Fathers, do your children understand the theology of the family? Have you taught them the Scriptures or do you leave that to the church? “*My son, give attention to **my words**; incline your ear to my sayings*” (Prov. 4:20). Second, we teach, train and discipline our children by our example—training them in righteousness—“***train up** a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*” (Prov. 22:6); “*For whom the Lord loves He **reproves**, even as a father, the son in whom he delights*” (Prov. 3:12); “*Hear, O sons, the **instruction** of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding*” (Prov. 4:1); “*My son, observe the **commandment** of your father...*” (Prov. 6:20).

Fathers, we must also be just rulers of our households, and not capricious dictators—providing for our children—protecting them and showing compassion. We must meet their physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, etc., but this is the easy part). We are responsible for their physical safety. We are responsible for what they are taught and for who teaches them—it matters where they go to school. Even more importantly, it matters what we teach them (and we do teach them). We must show our children the grace and compassion of our heavenly Father: “*Just as a father has **compassion** on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him*” (Ps. 103:13). Even when they sin and let you down—like the father of the prodigal son, “*And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and **felt compassion** for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him*” (Luke 15:20).

How are our children's hearts turned toward us? Remember, we are talking about the *heart*, not simply some outward conformity to the rules of the household. If all we have is good children but fail to see regenerate hearts in those children, then we have come short of the

grace of God. Fathers, *our children's hearts are turned toward us when they are convinced that our hearts are turned toward them.* When we have loved them, they will love us. When we have trained them they will conform to the training. When they have been disciplined with justice and mercy they will incline their ear to hear us. When we have been faithful and godly fathers before them, they will respect us. When we have shown them in every way what the heavenly Father is like, then their hearts will be turned toward us! Then the full blessings of the children, regardless of the quantity, will be realized to our good and the glory of God.