



**Reforming the Family:  
Lessons from Our  
Reformed and Puritan Heritage**

**Terry L. Johnson**



## Reforming the Family

### Introduction

1. [Background: the ideal Christian life](#)
  2. [New ideals of the Reformation](#)
    - i. [Marriage as companionship](#)
    - ii. [Positive sexuality](#)
    - iii. [Elevated status of child rearing](#)
- I. [Family](#): foundational to church and society
- II. [Marriage](#)
1. [Spiritual foundation](#)
  2. [Duties common to both husband and wife](#)
    - i. [amity](#)
    - ii. [fidelity](#)
  3. [Duties of husbands to wives](#)
    - i. [love](#)
    - ii. [leadership](#)
    - iii. [instruction and admonishment](#)
    - iv. [sympathetic understanding](#)
  4. [Duties of wives to husbands](#)
    - i. [honor and reverence](#)
    - ii. [subjection](#)
  5. [Duties of parents to children](#)
    - i. [with reference to their souls](#)
      - a. [dedicate through baptism](#)
      - b. [instruct them in will and word of God](#)
      - c. [acquaint them with the works of God](#)
      - d. [pray](#)

- e. [reprove and correct](#)
    - 1. [aim to break their wills](#)
    - 2. [begin early](#)
    - 3. [be consistent](#)
    - 4. [be balanced](#)
    - 5. [be impartial](#)
    - 6. [calibrate punishments to temperaments](#)
    - 7. [be exemplary; set a good pattern](#)
  - ii. [with reference to their temporal estates](#)
    - a. [provide necessities of a physical life](#)
    - b. [insist on moderation](#)
    - c. [limit sports and recreations](#)
    - d. [root out the sin of pride](#)
    - e. [keep from bad company](#)
    - f. [guard from opposite sex](#)
    - g. [teach a lawful calling](#)
    - h. [provide a marriage partner](#)
6. [Parental hopes](#)

### III. [Family worship](#)

- 1. [Family as church, nursery, seminary](#)
- 2. [The setting of family worship: the godly home](#)
- 3. [Arguments for family worship](#)
  - i. [biblical](#)
    - (a) [Old Testament](#)
    - (b) [New Testamant](#)
  - ii. [reason](#)
- 4. [Elements of family worship](#)

- i. [prayer](#)
- ii. [reading of Scripture](#)
- iii. [singing of psalms](#)
5. [Manner](#)
6. [Frequency, length, time](#)
7. [Excuses](#)
  - i. [lack ability](#)
  - ii. lack eloquence
  - iii. [lack time](#)

#### IV. [Catechizing](#)

1. [Begin early](#)
2. Basic forms
  - i. [explain baptism and the covenant](#)
  - ii. [memorize Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments](#)
  - iii. [memorize Shorter, then Larger catechism](#)
  - iv. [read good expositions of catechisms, e.g. Watson, \*A Body of Divinity\*](#)
3. [Method](#)
  - i. [questions and application](#)
  - ii. [don't do too much](#)
  - iii. [positive environment](#)

#### V. **Concluding hopes**

#### VI. [Bibliography](#)



## “Reforming the Family: Lessons from Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage”

The Reformation is sometimes treated as though it were merely a movement of theological reform, or at most one of ecclesiastical reform. However, the logic of Protestant theology flowed out of the church and into the streets, as it were, touching all aspects of life. This can be seen in particular in the case of marriage and family.

### Background<sup>1</sup>

The Reformers maintained that God was to be glorified in the home as well as the church. “Nothing caught the new clergy up more personally in the Reformation’s transition from theory to real life,” says Steven Ozment, “than the institution of marriage.”<sup>2</sup> As was the case with the reform of worship and church government, reforms of family life were theologically driven. Where is the ideal Christian life lived? According to the pre-Reformation church, it was lived in a monastery or convent. Truly serious Christians, those truly devoted to Christ, would commit themselves to the monastic ideals of separation and celibacy. Marriage was honored, but rated below the cloistered life of perpetual virginity. This preference for monastic celibacy arose primarily out of a theological commitment to works-righteousness and an ascetic philosophy of spiritual ascent. The result was the demeaning of marriage. Steven Ozment says of the Medieval church that “by so exalting celibacy and the cloister as the supreme forms of individual and communal self-realization *it indirectly demeaned marriage and family as an imperfect, second-class estate*” (my emphasis).<sup>3</sup> For example, Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits, urged Catholics in the fourth rule of his *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) “to praise highly the religious life, virginity, and continence; and also matrimony, but not as highly.”<sup>4</sup> Marriage was seen, says Ozment, as “an institution best shunned by knowledgeable males.” As for females, “unmarried virgins and continent widows were always spiritually superior to wives and mothers, and marriage was a debased state in comparison with the life of the cloister.”<sup>5</sup>

When the Reformation affirmed justification by faith alone, in Christ alone through grace alone, it rejected the ascetic ideal and affirmed marriage. Ozment claims that for both the German and Swiss Reformers, “clerical marriage was as prominent a tenant as justification by faith.”<sup>6</sup> The Reformer’s rejection of the celibate ideal “was as great a revolution in traditional church teaching and practice as their challenge of the church’s dogmas on faith, works, and the sacraments.”<sup>7</sup> “The Protestant Reformers were . . . the first to set the family unequivocally above the celibate ideal,” continues Ozment, “and to praise the husband and the housewife over the monk and the nun in principle.”<sup>7</sup> Where is the ideal Christian life to be lived? In a family. As

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of the opening section is adapted (from T. L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 144-149.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 151.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ozment, *Fathers*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ozment, *Protestants*, 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

another leading scholar affirms, “Marriage and family replaced celibacy as the divinely ordained setting for a Christian life and salvation.”<sup>8</sup>

The critical event in this new view of marriage took place in 1525 when Luther married Katherine von Bora. Katherine, along with nine other recent escapees from a neighboring convent, arrived in Wittenberg in the spring of 1523. Luther aided all nine in finding husbands or positions, save one, Katherine. An arranged marriage fell through and a second was refused by Katherine. In the end Luther decided to marry her himself. Ozment suggests she had her eye on Luther from the beginning.<sup>9</sup> “For heaven’s sake, not this one,” some of Luther’s friends protested.<sup>10</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1525 they were married. “I have made angels laugh and the devils weep,” he wrote Spalatin.<sup>11</sup>

One year later Katherine gave birth to a son, Hans. Luther wrote to a friend, “My Katherine is fulfilling Genesis 1:28.”<sup>12</sup> Over the next 8 years five more children arrived, for a total of 3 boys and 3 girls. They enjoyed over 20 years of marriage. Luther’s marriage and family became the ideal which many followed. Home, wife, and children came to be seen as positive benefits, not grace-inhibiting burdens.

The Reformers brought a number of new ideals to marriage and family.

### **New ideals**

*First, they understood marriage as companionship.* Luther depended upon Katherine as his companion, helper and friend. When she was ill he cried, “Oh, Katie, do not die and leave me.”<sup>13</sup> He paid her the highest compliments, calling the book of Galatians (his favorite) “my Katherine von Bora.” He said of her,

My Katie is in all things so obliging and pleasing to me that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus.<sup>14</sup>

He spoke with the voice of an experienced husband when he said, “There is no bond on earth so sweet nor any separation so bitter as that which occurs in a good marriage.”<sup>15</sup> The classical vs. ideal of companionship among male friendship was transferred by the Reformers and their successors to marriage. One’s wife was to be one’s closest and dearest friend. One hundred and fifty years after Luther, Matthew Henry, commenting on Genesis 2:22, spoke for the whole Reformation tradition when he said,

---

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Max Safley, “Family,” in Hans J. Hillerbrand (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Volumes 1-4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2:93.

<sup>9</sup> Ozment, *Fathers*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (1950; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 288.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>15</sup> Ozment, *Protestants*, 160.



The woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.<sup>16</sup>

Men came to see their wives as co-workers and equals, if still subordinate. Husbands and wives worked together to build the family and raise the children. The Reformers encouraged the education of girls so that they might read the Bible for themselves and better nurture the children in the Christian faith. Husbands and wives were partners. Calvin expressed this attitude in his tribute to his wife upon her death:

I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordered, would not only have been the willing share of my indigence, but even of my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry.<sup>17</sup>

*Second, they esteemed sexual relations within marriage.* The dominant view coming out of the Middle Ages was that sexual desire was evil even in marriage. Virginity and celibacy were glorified. Augustine portrayed the marriage act in Paradise as occurring without passion. Even married couples were encouraged to abstain. This was all part of the prevailing neo-Platonic spirituality which saw spiritual progress occurring through the suppression of bodily appetites. Fasting, celibacy, even denying the body sleep were seen as necessary disciplines for the serious Christian. The Church Fathers were nearly unanimous on asceticism and specifically on celibacy. Luther criticized the older theologians (Jerome, Cyprian, Augustine, and Gregory) for “never having written anything good about marriage.”<sup>18</sup> Thomas More (1478-1535), representing the medieval view, accused Protestants of license, as those who “eat fast and drink fast and lust fast in their lechery.”<sup>19</sup> In opposing this view the Reformers affirmed the goodness of sexual relations and even sexual pleasure in marriage. They utilized various euphemisms to describe these relations, such as “matrimonial duty,” “due benevolence” (from KJV of 1 Cor 7:3),<sup>20</sup> “act of matrimony,” or “mutual communication of bodies.”<sup>21</sup> English Puritan William Gouge (1575-1653) refers to marital intimacy as “a most pleasant and sweet harmony.”<sup>22</sup> Another, Alexander Niechdes, says one’s spouse is “a companion for pleasure.”<sup>23</sup> The Song of Solomon, he says, describes “a kind of ravishment... in the entertainment of wedded leisures.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Philadelphia: Tarvar & Hogan, 1828), on Genesis 2:27.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, Frank M. Turner, *The Western Heritage*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 380; quoting J. Bonnet, trans., *Letters of John Calvin*, Vol. 2. (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1858), 216.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Ozment, *Protestants*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 41.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, William Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties* (1622; Pensacola, FL: Puritan Reprints, 2006), etc. 136, 191.

<sup>21</sup> Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Medieval society regrettably had become polarized between the celibate ideal and the celebration of adulterous romantic love in the love stories and poems of the era. However, as Leland Ryken points out, the Reformation altered the equation:

By the time we reach the end of the sixteenth century, the ideal of *wedded* romantic love had replaced the adulterous courtly love ideal of the Middle Ages as the customary subject for literature.<sup>25</sup>

Ryken quotes C. S. Lewis, who argued that

the conversation of courtly love into romantic monogamous love was... largely the work of English, and even of Puritan, poets.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly Herbert Richardson, another modern scholar cited by Ryken, claims that the Puritans

did what courtly lovers had never dared to do: by combining the romantic love relation and the marriage relation, they created the new social institution of *romantic marriage*.<sup>27</sup>

Further he says,

The rise of romantic marriage and its validation by the Puritans . . . represents a major innovation within the Christian tradition.<sup>28</sup>

*Third, they elevated children and the task of child rearing.* Luther was a vigorous defender of marriage and parenting. According to Ozment, “He exalted the family in all its dimensions and utterly without qualification.”<sup>29</sup> Against the Medieval tendency to either denigrate women as temptresses (like Eve) or exalt them as virgins (like Mary), the Reformers praised their divine vocation as wives and mothers. “There is no power on earth that is nobler or greater than that of parents,” said Luther.<sup>30</sup> The greatest service that one could perform for humanity was to rear godly children. “When a father washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child,” said Luther, “God with all His angels and creatures is smiling.”<sup>31</sup>

The new Protestant family was seen not as a necessary concession to weakness, nor as a grace-inhibiting burden, but as the foundation of society. Fathers were seen as priests, families as “little churches,” the home as “the cradle of civilization.” Child rearing was understood as more than nutrition and hygiene. The spiritual welfare of the children was at the center of the family’s concerns. During the Middle Ages the monasteries were communities of prayer. Wherever the Reformation took root, the responsibility for daily prayer shifted to the Christian home. Family

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.234, note 81.

<sup>29</sup> Ozment, *Protestants*, 165.

<sup>30</sup> Ozment, *Fathers*, 132.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 8.

worship in the home became a hallmark of Protestantism for generations and right up until the recent past. Few practices of our forefathers are in more need of reviving today than this.<sup>32</sup>

Marriage, says Ozment, was viewed as “the foundation and nucleus of society and the divine instrument for its stability and reform.” Management of the household was seen “as the highest human art.”<sup>33</sup>

J. I. Packer credits the English Puritans, the most consistent heirs of the Reformation, with virtually creating the family as we have come to know of it in the English speaking world, saying “. . . in the same sense in which, under God, they were creators of the English Christian Sunday, so they were creators of the English Christian marriage, the English Christian family, and the English Christian home.”<sup>34</sup> The Puritans and their successors extended the seminal thoughts of the Reformers, developing the foundational ideals of the Christian home, beginning with marriage and encompassing the roles of husbands, wives, and children. They produced an entirely new body of literature detailing the importance of the home and the duties of parents and children.

## Family

According to the Reformers and their successors, the family is society’s essential institution. “The family,” says Reformation scholar Thomas Max Safley, citing several 16<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran sources, “was the first school of religion,” “the first school of society,” and “the first school of economy.”<sup>35</sup> Upon the family, the Reformers and their successors insisted, depends the health of both the church and the nation. Thomas Manton (1620-1677) in his “Epistle to the Reader” prefacing the Westminster Standards, says,

A family is the seminary of Church and State; and if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth.<sup>36</sup>

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), another leading representative of English Puritanism, in his one and a quarter million word classic, “A Christian Directory,” writes that “A holy, well-governed family is the preparation to a holy and well-governed church,” as well as “a happy state and commonwealth.”<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, he continues,

A holy family is a garden of God; it is beautiful with his graces, and ordered by his government, and fruitful by the showers of his heavenly blessing.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> See T. L. Johnson, *The Family Worship Book* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1998, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Ozment, *Fathers*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 260.

<sup>35</sup> Safley, “Family,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 2:95.

<sup>36</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Richard Baxter, “A Christian Directory,” *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Volumes 1-4 (1654-5, 1673; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 19<sup>th</sup> century reprint, 1990), 1:425, 426.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I:426.

His contemporary George Swinnock (1627-1673), writing in his classic, “A Christian Man’s Calling,” says the same: “The way to make godly parishes, to make godly countries, to make godly kingdoms, is to make godly families.”<sup>39</sup> According to Matthew Henry (1662-1714), who in many ways represents the apex of Reformed pastoral thought, “We cannot better serve our country than by keeping up religion in our families.”<sup>40</sup> Across the Atlantic Cotton Mather (1663-1728) was affirming the same:

“Well-ordered families naturally produce a good order in other societies. When families are under an ill discipline, all other societies [will be] ill disciplined.”<sup>41</sup>

Samuel Davies (1723-1761), the American Presbyterian concurs:

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance to religion and civil society that families be under proper regulations that they may produce proper plants for church and state and, especially, for the eternal world in which all the temporary associations of mortals in this world finally terminate, and to which they ultimately refer.<sup>42</sup>

Most of what is wrong in the world may be attributed to the breakdown of the family. Baxter argues,

So that it is an evident truth, that most of the mischiefs that now infest or seize upon mankind throughout the earth, consist in, or are caused by, the disorders and ill-governedness of families. These are the schools and shops of Satan, from whence proceed the beastly ignorance, lust, and sensuality, the devilish pride, malignity, and cruelty against the holy ways of God, which have so unmanned the progeny of Adam. These are the nests in which the serpent doth hatch the eggs of covetousness, envy, strife, revenge, of tyranny, disobedience, wars, and bloodshed, and all the leprosy of sin that hath so odiously contaminated human nature, and all the miseries by which they make the world calamitous.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, the family has a vital, an indispensable role to play in both the church and society, the health of which both depend in the health of the family.

## Marriage

The health of the family, in turn, depends on the health of the marriage. Ryken quotes the learned Westminster divine Thomas Gataker (1574-1654):

---

<sup>39</sup> George Swinnock, “A Christian Man’s Calling,” *The Works of George Swinnock*, Vol. I (1808; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), I:330.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew Henry, “A Church in the House,” *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry: Treatises, Sermons, and Tracts*, Volumes I-II (1855; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), I:262.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Davies, “The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion,” in Don Kistler (ed.), *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 2; Ryken cites similar sentiments from James Fitch (1622-1702) and William Gouge (*Worldly Saints*, 73).

<sup>43</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:427.

There is no society more near, more entire, more needful, more kindly, more delightful, more comfortable, more constant, more continual, than the society of man and wife, the main root, source, and original of all other societies.”<sup>44</sup>

Marriage, he wrote further, is “one of the greatest outward blessings that in this world man enjoyeth.”<sup>45</sup> According to Swinnock, “Marriage is a fellowship of the nearest union and dearest communion in this world.”<sup>46</sup> At the same time Swinnock warns, “Consider a wife or a husband is the greatest outward *comfort* or *cross* in this world.”<sup>47</sup> Again, “Thy wife will be the best friend or worst foe that godliness can have in thy family.”<sup>48</sup>

A healthy marriage is possible only if a Christian foundation is in place. Swinnock maintains that separated from “religion,” marriage is often “the sowing of dissension.”<sup>49</sup> He observes that

the fire of passion reigneth in the man, and the fire of pride rageth in the woman; and the fire of contention between both. It is the want of godliness in this relation which maketh many married persons look on their matrimonial covenant just as a dog doth on his chain, and a prisoner on his fetters, snarling and striving to break it in sunder, and set themselves at liberty.<sup>50</sup>

He cites an old Spanish proverb: “The Spanish proverb hath a truth in it, that there is more required to marriage than two pair of legs in one pair of sheets.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently he provides reasons for the importance of a spiritual or religious, that is, Christian foundation for marriage. “God did not institute marriage to be a hindrance, but to be a help to religion.”<sup>52</sup>

### *Spiritual foundations*

For the following reasons the religious/spiritual/foundations of marriage are critical.

1. The *dignity* of marriage. Marriage is to be “held in honor” (Heb 13:4). It is, says Swinnock, “not only lawful and unblamable, but also noble and honorable.”<sup>53</sup> This can be seen in:

- i) its *divine institution* – God is its author; He approves of it and is pleased by it.
- ii) it was *instituted in innocency*. It was not a provision for the fall because it preceded it (Gen 2 vs. Gen 3). Adam “was married to a wife before he was marred by the wicked one.”<sup>54</sup> “Man pleased God by taking a wife, before ever he displeased God by hearkening to his wife.”<sup>55</sup> Marriage, then, is an honorable estate.

---

<sup>44</sup> Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 42, 43.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Swinnock, “A Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:362.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, I:335.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, I:336.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, I:465.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I:466.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; I:465.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, I:467.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

- iii) it is for those able to perform the *essential duties* of marriage.<sup>56</sup>
- iv) its purpose is i) companionship; ii) reproduction

2. The *frailty* and *brevity* of marriage. Couples have but few years together. They should make the most of their time to encourage godliness in each other. This should be their central aim. Couples are “especially to be helpers of each other’s salvation,” says Baxter, this time writing in the “Poor Man’s Family Bible.”<sup>57</sup> This they can only do if they are committed believers. Swinnock exhorts husbands:

Reader, art thou a husband? Consider that within a few days God will take away from thee the delight of thine eyes with a stroke; thy voice ere long will not be, Where is my wife? or Call your mother, or mistress, to a child or servant; but, alas! she is dead!... And then if thou reflectest upon thy carriage towards her, and conversation with her, how thou didst live with her without God, often wrangling, but seldom or never praying together; often contriving how to increase your temporal goods, but never conspiring together how to further your everlasting good, then surely thou wilt have cause to cry out, Alas! my poor wife, where art thou housed in the other world? And to mourn and to weep for her indeed, and for thyself too. Will she not, thinkest thou, say to thee, when she meets thee at the great day, as Zipporah to Moses, A bloody husband hast thou been to me?

Then he exhorts wives:

Reader, if thou art a wife, the next time thou lookest on thy loving husband, consider with thy self: This dearly beloved husband of mine, in whose company I have had such content and comfort, must ere long be separated from me; those ruddy lips, which have so often kissed me, will be pale; that countenance, which hath so often smiled on me, will be wan and ghastly; those arms, which have so often embraced, will hang down; that whole body will ere long be food for worms, and crumble into dust; and shall I make it my business only to please his palate, and feed his flesh, and to live with him as brutes do together, minding nothing but carnal pleasure? Or shall I not rather provoke him to love and to good works, meekly persuade him to mind piety, to pray with me, to provide for death and judgment, that we may live together as fellow-heirs, and at last meet together in the blessed inheritance?<sup>58</sup>

3. The *covenant* commitment in marriage (see Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14). Have spouses not made promises that we are obligated to keep? Are we all not weak, frail, and needy? Is the keeping of one’s commitments possible only with the strength that God provides? Indeed.

---

<sup>56</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Baxter, “The Poor Man’s Family Book,” *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Volumes 1-4 (1654-5, 1673; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 4:234.

<sup>58</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:468.

4. The *crosses* that attend marriage. God's grace is necessary if one is to overcome the difficulties of marriage.

A married condition is comfortable, but yet, like the bee, it hath its sting as well as its honey; as the rose, it hath many prickles as well as some sweetness. 'Such,' saith the apostle, speaking of married persons, 'shall have trouble in the flesh,' 1 Cor. vii. 28. Marriage is both honorable and onerous; as it hath its blessings, so it is not without its burdens. I must tell thee it is godliness alone which can teach thee, as a bird in a hedge, to sing and be cheerful in the midst of those thorns and briers, those troubles which in this estate surround thee.<sup>59</sup>

Having established the importance of the religious commitments that are at the foundation of Christian marriage, our authors go on to discuss marital duties.

### *Duties common to both husband and wife*

1. *Amity* – mutual affection. They are "entirely to love each other," says Baxter, "and avoid all things that tend to quench (their) love."<sup>60</sup> Swinnock elaborates:

This is the nearest relation, and therefore requireth the dearest affection. They are one in many bonds; they have one name, and therefore should have one nature; they are one in the fruit of their loins, and hence should be one in love, Job xix. 17. They are one body, one flesh, and so should have but one soul, one spirit; they have one bed, one board, one house, and therefore should be one in heart."<sup>61</sup>

Swinnock argues that "cleave" in Matthew 19:5 means "be glued to his wife, importing a conjunction so near as nothing can come between, and so firm that nothing can dissolve it."<sup>62</sup> Packer cites at length the English Puritan founder of the Connecticut colony, Thomas Hooker (1586-1647), who writing of the church's love of Christ and Christ's love for his church, writes illuminatingly of the Puritan view of marital affection: First, of the wife's affection for her husband, Christ's sacraments being His love-tokens to her.

As a wife deales with the letters of her husband that is in a farre Country; she finds many sweet inklings of his love, and shee will read these letters often, and daily; she would talke with her husband a farre off, and see him in the letters. Oh (saith she) thus and thus hee thought when he writ these lines, and then she thinks he speaks to her againe; she reads these letters only, because she would be with her husband a little, and have a little parley with him in his pen, though not in his presence: so these ordinances are but the Lord's love-letters.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., I:470.

<sup>60</sup> Baxter, "Poor Man's Family Book," *Works*, 4:234.

<sup>61</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:471.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., I:473.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Packer, *Quest*, 265.

Then of the husband's affection for his wife:

The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves, he dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye and apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at table, walks with her when he travels and parlies with her in each place where he comes...

That the Husband tenders his Spouse with an indeared affection above all mortal creatures: This appeareth by the expressions of respect, that all he hath, is at her command, all he can do, is wholly improved for her content and comfort, she lies in his Bosom, and his heart trusts in her, which forceth al to confess, that the stream of his affection, like a mighty current, runs with full Tide and strength.<sup>64</sup>

Marital love should be "ardent and robust," says Packer of the Puritan view, citing the strong words of William Gouge:

...the disposition of such husbands as have no heat, or heart of affection in them... a disposition no way warranted by the Word. The faithful saints of God... were no Stoicks, without all affection: nor did they think it a matter unbeseeing them, after a peculiar manner to delight in their wives (witness Isaaks sporting with his wife): for this is a privilege which appertaineth to the estate of marriage.<sup>65</sup>

Cotton Mather called his wife

a most lovely creature and such a gift of heaven to me and mine that they sense thereof ... dissolves me into tears.<sup>66</sup>

Edward Taylor (1642-1729) wrote to his wife that his passion for her was "a golden ball of pure fire."<sup>67</sup> Piety, we are again reminded, must be at the foundation to maintain their amity. "When the root of love is wrong," says Swinnock, "the fruit will quickly be rotten."<sup>68</sup>

## 2. Fidelity

Married couples, says Swinnock, "are partners in the nearest degree imaginable and therefore, if unfaithful, the most foolish thieves that are possible."<sup>69</sup> They are "to keep conjugal chastity and fidelity," says Baxter, "and avoid all unseemly and immodest carriage with any other."<sup>70</sup> This is further elaborated.

i) They must be faithful regarding *estates*, *names*, and *bodies*.  
re. *estates* – "The man's business is to get, and the woman's to keep and save."<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:475.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Baxter, "Poor Man's Family Book," *Works*, 4:234.

<sup>71</sup> Swinnock "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:475.



re. *names* – It is the duty of husbands and wives to guard each other’s names and honor, even to conceal each other’s weaknesses and failings. Baxter calls it “a sinful and unfaithful practice” to expose rather than conceal your spouse’s infirmities.<sup>72</sup> “It is “as if they perceived not that by dishonouring one another, they dishonor themselves.”<sup>73</sup> He asks, “Did you not know beforehand that you married a person of such weakness, as would yield you some matter of daily trial and offence?” Remember “that you took one another as sinful, frail, imperfect persons, and not as angels or as blameless or perfect.”<sup>74</sup> Swinnock makes the same point:

They ought to conceal each other’s infirmities; it is wonderful folly for wives to publish their husbands’ faults, and for husbands to proclaim their wives’ weaknesses. Hereby they disparage and injure themselves; they disparage themselves both in blazing abroad their want of wit in making such an ill choice, and as they are sharers in each other’s honour and disgrace.<sup>75</sup>

re. *bodies* – Both the husband and wife, says Swinnock, must be given “the seasonable, moderate use of the others body and denying it to all others,” citing Proverbs 5:18, 19 (“Rejoice in the wife of your youth...”).<sup>76</sup>

The very motions or temptations to it should be rejected with the greatest dislike and detestation. Other failings disturb their comfort, but his unfaithfulness dissolveth their covenant.<sup>77</sup>

Adultery is regarded by our authors as among the most heinous of sins. “I find no sin throughout the whole of Scripture so notoriously in the several colours thereof set forth, as it is,” says Gouge.<sup>78</sup>

To guard against it the husband and wife must mutually delight in each other, and maintain a pure and fervent love betwixt themselves, yielding that *due benevolence* one to another which is warranted and sanctified by God’s word, and ordained of God for this particular end.<sup>79</sup>

The marriage act is termed “benevolence” by the Apostle (1 Cor 7:3, KJV) because, says Gouge, “it must be performed with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully.” It is said to be “due” “because it is a debt which the wife oweth to her husband, and he to her” (citing 1 Cor 7:4, 5).<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Richard Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:435.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, I:437.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:433.

<sup>75</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:475.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, I:476.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 159.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, husbands and wives are to guard against *excess*, Gouge warns, as “when husband or wife is insatiable; provoking rather than assuaging lust, and weakening their natural vigors more than suppressing their natural humour. *Many husbands and wives are oppressed by their bedfellows insatiableness in this kind.*”<sup>81</sup> So seriously did Reformed Protestantism take the responsibility to fulfill conjugal duties that those who failed to do so could be subject to church discipline, as one author explains:

During the seventeenth century, when James Mattock’s wife complained first to her pastor and then to the entire congregation that her husband was not sexually responsive to her, the members of the First Church of Boston expelled him for denying conjugal “fellowship unto his wife for a space of two years together.” In fact, court records for the years 1639-1711 reveal that about one of every six divorce petitions filed by women “involved charges of male sexual incapacity.” Nor was impotence the only grounds for female dissatisfaction that the courts recognized. John William’s wife was granted a divorce on the complaint of his “refuysing to perform marriage duty unto her.” Indeed, it was widely agreed that husbands who failed to sexually gratify their wives bore primary responsibility for the wife’s extramarital affairs. Elizabeth Jerrad was granted a divorce and exonerated of adultery because of her husband’s inattention, the court ruling to “release her from matrimonial tye to sayd Robert Jarrad that so she may also be freed from temptation as hath occasioned her gross & scandolouse fall into the sinn of uncleanness.” New England courts consistently “upheld the view that women had a right to expect ‘content and satisfaction’ in bed,” according to the historian Richard Godbeer.<sup>82</sup>

Citing Proverbs 7:25, 27, Hebrews 13:4, Swinnock urges that, “Men must have the highest thoughts of their own wives, and women of their own husbands, and then they will not look so as to lust after others.”<sup>83</sup> Yet even in marriage lust must be tamed and moderation maintained. One must guard against what Gouge terms “unreasonable desire.”<sup>84</sup> “Lust must not be cherished in the married,” says Baxter, “but the mind must be brought to a moderate, chaste, and sober frame.”<sup>85</sup>

ii) They must be faithful to help each other in both *secular* and *sacred* things. They must share in each other’s worldly joys and sorrows. Swinnock maintains:

They must help one another in civil and natural things, comforting each other both in health and sickness, cheering one another both in a prosperous and adverse condition. The husband and wife must be mutually

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 162 (my emphasis).

<sup>82</sup> Rodney Stark, *How the West Was Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 278-279.

<sup>83</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:477.

<sup>84</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 162.

<sup>85</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:431.

assisting about their personal and their domestical concernments. As the husband is the chief, so he must take the chiefest of things. As the wife is helped by her husband, so she must be a help to her husband. If the wife be weak, the husband must be more watchful for her, and tender of her, that she receive no wrongs; for therefore, as Lot said of the angels, is she come under the shadow of his roof. If the husband be sick or sad, the wife must endeavor to be both his physician and physic, his comforter and cordial.<sup>86</sup>

Regarding sacred things, Baxter insists, “To help each other only for your bellies, is to live together but like beasts.”<sup>87</sup> Swinnock likewise urges,

If they love each other in obedience to God’s command, they will love another according to God’s command, that is, so as chiefly to endeavor each other’s eternal welfare. Spiritual communion together with God will be the best preservative of their affection to each other.<sup>88</sup>

He offers this exhortation/prayer for married couples:

Oh that... all our thoughts of each other may be sweetened with love, and all our words to each other seasoned with love; and that in our actions towards each other, love, as a simple of a predominant quality, may give a relish and savour to them all! Our Redeemer, who hath given us this precept, and set himself for our pattern, is love; his name is love, his nature is love, his sacraments are seals of love, his Spirit is the earnest of love, his Scripture is his letter of love, his providences are all written in the characters of love; his ordinances are love’s banqueting-house, wherein his banner over us is love. Oh then, what love should we have each to other! How close should we cleave in our affections, who are bound together by God himself, both with the bond of religion and relation, and are provoked to it by such loving precepts, and such a lively pattern! Surely such cords should not be easily broken. Love is the bond of perfection, and the perfection of all bonds; it is the perfect bond which will tie all our duties and graces together, without which they will fall asunder. ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant is it for husband and wife to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore,’ Ps. cxxxiii. Oh that love may be our strength, wherewith we may bear one another’s burdens; that love may be our mantle, wherewith we may cover one another’s infirmities; and that love,

---

<sup>86</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:478.

<sup>87</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:434.

<sup>88</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:479.

like the fire in Elijah's trench, may lick up all the water of opposition which may ever arise between us!<sup>89</sup>

Such a marriage is a foretaste of heaven:

If converse with flesh and blood yield such comfort, what infinite delight, and unconceivable consolation will flow from immediate, uninterrupted, and eternal communion with thy blessed self! Oh, blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the lamb!<sup>90</sup>

Swinnock, Baxter and other writers then move on to discuss the distinctive duties of husbands and wives.

### *Duties of husbands*

Swinnock begins with an exhortation to husbands to lead their wives spiritually, to excel their wives in piety. A husband's leadership is to be by example.

If God hath called thee to this relation, mind holiness in it. Thou art above thy wife in place, oh be above her in piety... Thou shouldst draw thy wife and children along with thee to Christ by exemplary piety.<sup>91</sup>

What, then, are a husband's duties?

#### 1. *Love*

"All the duties of a husband are comprised under this word: *love*," says Gouge.<sup>92</sup> This is the point of Ephesians 5:25ff and Colossians 3:19.

*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.*

"It is observable that the Holy Ghost mentioneth this duty frequently and urgently," says Swinnock, "and that as it were the only duty enjoined the husband: 'Husbands, love your wives.'"<sup>93</sup> He cites two reasons:

Partly because husbands are most defective in this duty. Generally men are diligent in the exercise of their dominion, but negligent in regard of affection; hence their authority degenerateth into tyranny. Partly because this duty will exceedingly help to the performance of all the rest.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., I:484-485.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., I:487.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 30.

<sup>93</sup> Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling*, I:489 (see Eph 5:25, 28, 33; Col 3:19).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

He is to love with sacrificial love, as Christ loves the church. “Because they can never love so much as Christ did,” says Gouge, “they must never think they have loved enough.”<sup>95</sup> Love is the primary duty, hence, love is the primary and repeated command (see Eph 5:25, 28, 33; Col 3:19). The woman’s creation also shows how great a husband’s love for his wife should be, says Swinnock, using language that anticipates Henry’s classic statement:

She was not made of his head, to be his sovereign, nor of his feet, to be his slave; but of a rib in his side, to shew how near she should lie to his heart.<sup>96</sup>

This love for wife, Swinnock insists, should excel that for his blood relations: father and mother, sisters and brothers: “Next God and Christ, and his own salvation, his wife calls for the hottest and strongest affection.”<sup>97</sup>

## 2. Leadership

Husbands are to love their wives but not in such a way that surrenders their responsibility to lead. They are to lead, but not in such a way that nullifies their responsibility to love. Baxter urges, “A moderate course between a lordly rigor, and a soft subjection.” He cautions against the “neglect of exercising the power of your place” and “too much familiarity.”<sup>98</sup> “Love,” he says, must not be exercised so imprudently as to destroy the exercise of authority; and authority must not be exercised over a wife so magisterially and imperiously, as to destroy the exercise of love.<sup>99</sup>

Likewise Swinnock:

The dominion of a man over his wife is not that of a master over his slave, but such as the soul hath over the body; not for its hurt, but for its help, to further its welfare; or like that of the apostle over the churches committed to him by the Lord; for edification, and not for destruction, 2 Cor. x. 8. ‘Let all things be done in charity,’ saith the apostle. If all thy actions towards others, then much more all things that concern thy wife, should be done in love. Thy thoughts should be thoughts of love, thy looks should be looks of love; thy lips, like the honeycomb, should drop nothing but sweetness and love; thy instructions should be edged with love; thy reprehensions should be sweetened with love; thy carriage and whole conversation towards her should be but the fruit and demonstration of thy love. Oh how did Christ, who is thy pattern, love his spouse! His birth, life, and death were but, as it were, a stage whereon the hottest love imaginable from first to last, acted its part to the life.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Swinnock, *Christian Man’s Calling*, I:489.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, I:490.

<sup>98</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:423.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, I:439.

<sup>100</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:491-492.

Authority must be exercised with love. Swinnock continues:

Let thy dominion be exercised with discretion, lest by thy foolish fondness it be liable to contempt, or by thy rigorous severity it degenerate into cruelty. Wisdom must sit at the stern of thy authority, and so guide it in an even course, that it may neither dash upon the rock of scorn, nor sink in the quicksand of slavish fear. There are two principal affections which God requireth in thy wife in relation to thee, – reverence and love. Now, thy prudence must so manage thy authority, that these two may be preserved in their due place, and not interfere and cut each other; that her fear of thee may not, through thy severity, be turned into hatred, nor her love to thee, through thy familiarity, be turned into slighting thee. It is far better to reign in her heart by clemency, than to rule over her body by tyranny.<sup>101</sup>

### *3. Instruction and admonition*

Wives are to learn from husbands at home (1 Cor 14:35). Husbands should instruct their wives in the things of God both privately and patiently.

### *4. Sympathetic understanding*

Finally, Swinnock offers this prayer/exhortation to husbands urging a sympathetic outlook on their wives, drawing heavily from the analogy of Christ's love for His bride the church.

How sad is her condition, by reason of sin! Surely she may say, in the words of Hannah, 'I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit.' She conceiveth with sorrow, bringeth forth with much pain, and in bringing up her children often misseth of desired pleasure. Her fears disquiet her in the night, and her cares disturb her in the day. Her sons are possibly Benonis, sons of her sorrows, and her servants Barabbases, sons of confusion. Through her whole life the yoke of subjection is on her neck, and shall I rule over her with rigour, Mal. ii. 13, adding affliction to the afflicted, and wounding one whom God hath wounded? Should I cause her to sigh, by reason of her bondage, and to compass the Lord's altar about with tears and weeping, her cry would go up to heaven, for God hath a tender respect for oppressed wives, as well as afflicted widows, and he would bring some judgment on me to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. Oh let me never, like a Nabal, tyrannise and trample on my wife, as if she were my footstool. When God hath made her my fellow, and making her life, like the Israelites sojourning in Marah, full of mourning and murmuring, crying and complaining; but let her be to me, as Ezekiel's wife to him, the delight of mine eyes, and as the church to Christ, Cant. iv. 9, the ravisher of my heart, that I may always cheer her affectionately, and cherish her

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., I:488; Ryken cites John Robinson (1576-1625), Benjamin Wadsworth (1670-1737), and Samuel Willard (1640-1707), the latter of whom said that a good husband will so govern "that his wife may take delight in [his headship], and not account it a slavery but a liberty and privilege." (*Worldly Saints*, 76)

tenderly, as the Lord the church... Thou hast commanded me to love my wife as Christ loveth his spouse. My Saviour's love is *chaste*; there is not the least shadow of impurity in any of his commands. His love is *constant*. Having loved his own, he loves them to the end. Death itself could not burst asunder the cords of his love. His love is *fervent*; he was nothing else but a lump of love. His desire is to her, and his whole delight is in her.<sup>102</sup>

Is your wife a difficult woman? Excuse her faults, says Baxter, "considering also your own infirmity, and how much your wives must bear you."<sup>103</sup> He adds: "A good husband will either make a good wife, or easily and profitably endure a bad one."<sup>104</sup>

### *Duties of wives*

The Puritans affirmed the spiritual equality of the wife. Ryken claims that "the most customary Puritan term for defining the relationship was to call the wife an assistant."<sup>105</sup> He cites Gataker again who called the wife "an help, or an assistant; not a mate only, but an helper; not a companion only, but an assistant too."<sup>106</sup> Often the Puritans delegated considerable responsibility to their wives. Ryken cites Samuel Sewall (1674-1729), who handed over to this wife the family finances because she had "a better faculty than I at managing affairs."<sup>107</sup>

Swinnock notices that in Scripture the wife's duties are listed first (Eph 5:22ff; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6). Why is that? He cites two reasons: *First*, "because the duty of a wife is most difficult."<sup>108</sup> The husband's duty, to love, is pleasant. The wife's duty, to obey, is painful. *Second*, because the love of the husband depends much on the love of the wife. He counsels, "An obedient wife is the likeliest woman in the world to command her husband."<sup>109</sup> Swinnock leans heavily on Proverbs 31, especially verse 30. Her holiness and her husband will praise her. He notes that women often excel men in piety. "The feminine gender hath sometimes done more worthily than the masculine."<sup>110</sup> He cites Matthew 27:55 where we are told that the women were present at the foot of the cross, but not the men. "The weaker vessels have held out in the hottest fires."<sup>111</sup> Similarly Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) observes:

For the most part women have sweet affections to religion, and therein they oft go beyond men. The reason is, religion is especially sealed in the affections: And they have sweet and strong affections.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., I:498-500 (my emphasis).

<sup>103</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:431.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., I:438.

<sup>105</sup> Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 77.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 78. Ryken also cites William Gouge and the poet John Milton (1608-1674) to the same effect, the latter of whom wrote that there may be exceptions to the husband's authority over his wife "if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yield, for then a superior and more natural law comes in, that the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female. (*Worldly Saints*, 78)

<sup>108</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:503.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., I:504.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Packer, *Quest*, 267.

1. She is to *honor* her husband. She is to reverence him, like the church does Christ (Eph 5:22ff). He cites 1 Peter 3:2-4: “A reverent wife may possibly make a religious husband... Fear in her may be instrumental to work faith in him.”<sup>113</sup>

This reverence must be outward, in their expressions and actions; Sarah called Abraham lord, 1 Pet. iii. 6, not out of flattery, but to acknowledge his authority; not as desirous to humour his pride, but as willing to know her own place. Jezebel and Zipporah are both stigmatized in holy writ, for their saucy, sinful language to their husbands, Exod. iv. 25; 1 Kings xxx.7. If a woman answer her husband, it must be with modesty; if she would advise him, it must be with lenity; and if she admonish him, with much humility. If she speak of him, it must be respectfully; if she speak to him it must be reverently.<sup>114</sup>

Swinnock has strong words for rebellious wives.

Oh it is a most doleful living, where the wife, instead of reverencing, is always railing at, and wrangling with, her husband. There are wives that are worse than their dogs; their dogs, though they bark at strangers, will not bark at their master; but they spare not the husband, the master of the house, in their cursed peevishness and passions. Nay, the very devils amongst them have order; they will acknowledge a prince, a superior among them; but these wives will acknowledge none above them, but must rule all themselves, or else the house must quickly be made too hot for their husbands. A serpent is as good a companion as such a wife; for a serpent, if it kill, doth it suddenly, but such a wife makes her husband die lingeringly, for his whole life is a civil death. I thank my God, I never so much as tasted those sour herbs; but truly I have from my heart pitied some husbands, whose outward beings have by such wives been made as miserable as is almost possible on this side hell.<sup>115</sup>

He then exhorts wives:

Reader, if thou hast any fear of God, I know thou wilt fear thy husband, and then thy language to him, and of him, will be, not rude but reverent, and thy carriage will be, not pouting and lowering, frowning and fuming, but such as is clothed with the garment of meekness. In obeying his lawful precepts; thy work is not to complain of, but to comply with, thy husband's commands; obedience will arise naturally from reverence, and is the best testimony of it. Many women are noted for questioning and quarrelling at their husbands' power, but few for obeying their husbands' lawful pleasure. Sarah was chronicled and crowned in Scripture for obeying Abraham; but it is clear she had never a natural daughter. The Rabbis tell us that ten cabs or measures of speech descended into the world, and the woman took away nine of them. Many are indeed, – I speak not of all, – full of

---

<sup>113</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man's Calling,” *Works*, I:505.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, I:506.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, I:506-507.



words, but barren of works; apter to dispute their husband's authority than to obey it."<sup>116</sup>

2. She is to be subject to her husband. Scripture, says Swinnock, provides seven reasons for the woman's subjection to her husband.<sup>117</sup> Yet the fundamental reason is love to God, not love to husband,

for not the husband's affection to her, but her affection to God, must be the great motive to subjection. If my husband fail in his duty, I suffer; but if I fail in my duty, I sin. The former is a cross, but the latter is a curse."<sup>118</sup>

Swinnock cites a saying about Italian women: "angels in the streets, saints in the church, and devils in their houses."<sup>119</sup> This should never be the case. He worries that "many that make a great profession are exceedingly faulty in this particular of subjection."<sup>120</sup> Notwithstanding the onslaught of a resistant wife, men must not surrender authority. "It is no less than a breach of God's law for a man to make himself lower than God hath set him."<sup>121</sup> He turns to Proverbs 31. "The last chapter of Proverbs is an excellent looking glass for women to dress themselves by every morning."<sup>122</sup> Love your husbands. "Let him be to thee the most precious of all persons."<sup>123</sup> Let your love be a "superlative love."<sup>124</sup> Pray that you may be "a Mary for piety, as well as a Martha for industry."<sup>125</sup>

### *Duties of parents*

The duties of parents toward their children are comprehensive, embracing both their bodies and souls. Our authors are particularly sensitive to the tendency for parents to be content to provide for their children's physical well-being while neglecting the more important matter of their spiritual well-being.

#### 1. With reference to their *children's souls*

i) *Dedicate* your children through baptism. Through baptism they are admitted into God's covenant family and dedicated to God. Complaining that multitudes of parents are "more cruel than bears and lions to their own children," Baxter exhorts,

It is they that are at first to devote them to God, in the covenant of baptism: it is they that are to teach them (Deut. vi. 6-8; xi. 19, 20), and to exhort them to keep the covenant which they made, to

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., I:508.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., I:507-508.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., I:509.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., I:510.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., I:511.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., I:512.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., I:518.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., I:527.

catechize them, and to mind them of the state of their souls, their need of Christ, the mercy of redemption, the excellency of holiness, and of everlasting life. It is they that are to watch over them with wisdom, love, and diligence, to save them from temptation, Satan, and sin, and to lead them by the example of a holy life. It is they that are to watch over them with wisdom, love, and diligence, to save them from temptation, Satan, and sin, and to lead them by the example of a holy life.<sup>126</sup>

It would be irresponsible to baptize and dedicate one's children and then do nothing. God uses means. With children of the covenant. He uses parents. Throughout their lives parents are to remind them of the covenant to which they were committed.

Teach them, therefore, to know what covenant they have made, and do by them just as I have done by you. Cease not till you have brought them heartily to consent to it at age themselves; and then bring them to the pastor of the church, that they may seriously and solemnly own the covenant, and so may be admitted into the number of adult communicating members, in a regular way.<sup>127</sup>

ii) *Instruct* your children in the word and will of God. The Puritans were insistent regarding parental responsibility to provide for the religious education of their children. "Holy families," Baxter insists, "are the seminaries of Christ's church on earth."<sup>128</sup> Leading English non-conformist Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) in his four sermons on Proverbs 22:6, entitled "The Religious Education of Children," and others refer to them as "nursery of the church."<sup>129</sup> Parental responsibility begins with their culpability for their children's sin nature. Swinnock urges:

Surely they wantest the compassion of a father if thou dost not strive to mend by education, which thou hast marred by propagation.<sup>130</sup>

Again,

As both parents have a share in their children's pollution, so both must endeavor their children's conversion.<sup>131</sup>

Across the Atlantic Richard Mather (1596-1669), grandfather of Cotton, imagined children confronting their negligent parents in hell:

---

<sup>126</sup> Baxter, "Poor Man's Family Book," *Works*, 4:231.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:232.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:230; also Arthur Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," in *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 113; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Philip Doddridge, "Four Sermons on the Religious Education of Children," in Don Kistler (ed.), *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), 188.

<sup>130</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:398; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 378, 393.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, I:407; cf Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:449; see also Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 106, 134; Doddridge, "Religious Education," 193.

All this that we here suffer is through you: you should have taught us the things of God, and did not; you should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not; you were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never showed any competent care that we might be delivered from it... Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents, and woe unto you that had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.<sup>132</sup>

Note the point of reference: “You were the means of our original corruption and guiltiness,” obligating “competent care that we might be delivered from it.” Philip Doddridge emphasizes its importance:

There is nothing in which the comfort of families, the prosperity of nations, the salvation of souls, the interest of a Redeemer, and the glory of God, is more apparently and intimately concerned.

Doddridge also emphasizes parental responsibility to use means. Our inability to bring a soul to the saving knowledge of Christ “does not in the least weaken our obligation to the most diligent use of proper means.”<sup>133</sup> Though God alone can convert the children of believers, yet parents must do their part. Swinnock explains:

Though I cannot be the author to generate grace, yet I may be the instrument to promote it. Religious education is the best portion I can give them living, and the best legacy I can leave them dying.<sup>134</sup>

Baxter emphasizes the unique advantages parents have to rear disciples for Christ. His *Directory* provides seven.<sup>135</sup> He insists that,

No means in all the world doth more effectively tend to the happiness of souls, then wise and holy education.<sup>136</sup>

Our authors cite several passages in Deuteronomy which require that parents teach their children God’s word (Deut 4:9; 6:6-8; 11:18-21),<sup>137</sup> God’s charge to Abraham (Gen 18:17- 19),<sup>138</sup> the example of Timothy (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15),<sup>139</sup> and other

---

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 79; see also Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 232-233; the *Westminster Confession of Faith’s* “To the Reader” envisions a “dreadful meeting in eternity” between negligent parents and their children (5).

<sup>133</sup> Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 158.

<sup>134</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:429.

<sup>135</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:410, 411.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:422; we’ll return to these advantages when we look at family worship.

<sup>137</sup> E.g. Davies, “Family Religion,” 20; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 110, 113, 125; Philip Doddridge, “A Plain and Serious Address on the Important Subject of Family Religion,” in *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays and Duties of Parents and Children* [Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993], 186; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 392, 395, 401.

<sup>138</sup> E.g. Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, I:414; Davies, “Family Religion,” 17; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 106, 116, 132; Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 64; Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 39, 42; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 392, 394, 397.

<sup>139</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, I:414.

biblical commands to parents (e.g. Eph 6:4; Ps 78:4-6; Prov 22:6)<sup>140</sup> and children (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 3:22; Deut 21:18-20), all of which indicate the solemn responsibility of parents.

*17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have chosen him, 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 to Abraham what he has promised him." (Gen 18:17-19)*

*Train up a child in the way he should go;  
even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6)*

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)*

Abraham is to "command his children... to keep the way of the Lord," which certainly implies teaching them the way of "righteousness and justice." Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632) likens young children to soft wax, easy to make an impression upon. He compares them to little twigs, which may be bent in the desired direction. They are not yet characterized by the stubbornness and spirit of contradiction that will develop in later years. This is why Jesus tells adults that they must become like little children if they are to enter the kingdom of God (Mk 10:15).<sup>141</sup> Gouge utilizes the same metaphors, citing young Samuel (1 Sam 1:24), Solomon (Prov 4:3), and Timothy (2 Tim 3:15).<sup>142</sup> That children are to be trained up in the way that they should go implies, says Doddridge in his exposition of Proverbs 22:6, that parents begin early, at the beginning, "from the first dawning (of) reason," infusing "into tender unpractical mind the important maxims of wisdom and goodness."<sup>143</sup> Also citing Proverbs 22:6 ("Train up a child..."), Baxter argues for the priority of parental instruction over other means, not in the least because of parents' early access to their children.

I doubt not to affirm, that a godly education is God's first and ordinary appointed means, for the begetting of actual faith, and other graces, in the children of believers... The preaching of the word by public ministers is not the first ordinary means of grace, to any but those... on whom the first appointed means hath been neglected, or proved in vain: that is, it is but the second means, to do that which was not done by the first. The proof is undeniable; because God appointeth parents diligently to teach their children the doctrine of his holy word, before they come to the public ministry: parents' teaching is the first teaching; and parents' teaching is or this end, as well as public teaching, even to beget faith, and love, and

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 414, 418; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 113, 116, 392, 397-8; Whitefield, "Family Religion," 39; Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 110, 119.

<sup>141</sup> Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 128, 129; Manton utilizes the same metaphor in his "Epistle," 8.

<sup>142</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 397.

<sup>143</sup> Doddridge, "Religious Education," 160.

holiness; and God appointeth no means to be used by us, on which we may not expect his blessing. Therefore it is apparent, that the ordinary appointed means of the first actual grace, is parents' godly instruction and education of their children. And public preaching is appointed for the conversion of those only that have missed the blessing of the first appointed means. Therefore if you deny your children religious education, you deny them the first appointed means of their actual faith and sanctification; and then the second cometh upon disadvantage.<sup>144</sup>

Early access to the children is the crucial advantage parents have over churches and schools in the religious education of children.

You have them in hand betimes, before they have received any false opinions or bad impressions; before they have any sin but that which was born with them; you are to make the first impressions upon them: you have them while they are most teachable, and flexible, and tender, and make least resistance against instruction; they rise not up at first against your teaching with self-conceitedness and proud objections. But when they come to the minister, they are as paper that is written on or printed before, unapt to receive another impression; they have much to be untaught, before they can be taught; and come with proud and stiff resistance to strive against.<sup>145</sup>

Similarly John Flavel, in his classic *The Mystery of Providence*, offers us this encouragement,

There is none in the world so likely as you to be instruments of their eternal good.<sup>146</sup>

After presenting eight motives for parents to provide a Christian education for their children, Baxter closes with this exhortation to negligent parents.

And now let me seriously speak to the hearts of those careless and ungodly parents, that neglect the holy education of their children; yea, and to those professors of godliness, that slubber over so great a work with a few customary formal duties and words, that are next to a total omission of it. Oh be not so unmerciful to the souls that you have helped to bring into this world! Think not so basely of them, as if they were not worth your labour. Make not your children so like your beasts, as to make no provision but only for their flesh. Remember still that it is not beasts, but men, that you have begotten and brought forth: educate them then and use them as men, for the love and obedience of their Maker: oh pity and help the souls that you have defiled and undone! Have mercy on the souls that must perish in hell, if they be not saved in this day of salvation! Oh help them that have so many enemies to assault them! Help them that have so

---

<sup>144</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:428.

<sup>145</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:429; see also Doddridge, "Religious Education," 184, 185.

<sup>146</sup> John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (1678; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 58; see also *Works*, 374.

many temptations to pass through; and so many difficulties to overcome; and so severe a judgment to undergo! Help them that are so weak, and so easily deceived and overthrown! Help them speedily while your advantages continue; before sin have hardened them, and grace have forsaken them, and Satan place a stronger garrison in their hearts. Help them while they are tractable, before they are grown up to despise you help; before you and they are separated asunder, and your opportunities be at an end. You think not your pains from year to year too much to make provision for their bodies: oh be not cruel to their souls! Sell them not to Satan, and that for nought! Betray them not by your ungodly negligence to hell... If thou hadst instructed them diligently, and watched over them, and corrected them, and done thy part, it is like they had never come to this. You till your fields; you weed your gardens; what pains take you about your grounds and cattle! And will you not take more for your children's souls? Alas, what creatures will they be if you leave them to themselves! how ignorant, careless, rude, and beastly! Oh what a lamentable case have the ungodly parents brought the world into! Ignorance and selfishness, beastly sensuality, and devilish malignity, have covered the face of the earth as a deluge, and driven away wisdom, and self-denial, and piety, and charity, and justice, and temperance almost out of the world, confining them to the breasts of a few obscure, humble souls, that love virtue for virtue's sake, and look for their reward from God alone, and expect that by abstaining from iniquity they make themselves a prey to wolves, Isa. lix. 15. Wicked education hath unmanned the world, and subdued it to Satan, and make it almost like to hell. O do not join with the sons of Belial in this unnatural, horrid wickedness!<sup>147</sup>

Flavel also exhorts the unpersuaded:

If you neglect to instruct them in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?<sup>148</sup>

In all, Baxter's "Directory" provides 20 directions for parents. He emphasizes laboring by instruction, speech, and carriage to impart the fear of God, reverence for Scripture and the things of God (Ps 111:10; Prov 9:10), includes honor and praise for holy ministers and people, and a love for holiness.<sup>149</sup> What are children to be taught? "The plainest things and by the plainest words," says Doddridge.<sup>150</sup> "Common Christianity" rather than the interests of a party.<sup>151</sup> Doddridge provides seven particulars (again, from Proverbs 22:6):

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 1:430-431.

<sup>148</sup> Flavel, *Mystery of Providence*, 58; see also *Works*, 374.

<sup>149</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, I:432-\_\_ ; See also Doddridge, "Religious Education," 223-224.

<sup>150</sup> Doddridge, "Religious Education," 200.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 201.

1. “The way of piety and devotion to God.”<sup>152</sup> “It is of great importance that the children early imbibe an awe of God, and a humble veneration for His perfections and glory.”<sup>153</sup>
2. “The way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>154</sup>
3. “The way of obedience to parents”<sup>155</sup>
4. “The way of benevolence and kindness”<sup>156</sup>
5. “The way of diligence”<sup>157</sup>
6. “The way of integrity”<sup>158</sup> They should be taught to love “truth and candor.”<sup>159</sup>
7. “The way of humility”<sup>160</sup>
8. “The way of self-denial”<sup>161</sup>

Gouge counsels parents to teach continuously, as is the case with feeding their children. “Mothers will not at once cram more into their mouths, than their stomach is able to digest,” Gouge reminds us.<sup>162</sup> Rather teaching should be “precept upon precept, line upon line” (Isa 28:10). “If a vessel have a little mouth, we use not to fill it by pouring whole pail-fulls upon it.” Doddridge urges parents not only to teach their children plainly, seriously, and tenderly, but also patiently. “The growth of nature is slow, and by sensible degrees,” he cautions; “nor are you to wonder if advances in knowledge and grace are still slower.” Consequently, parents must “be upon your guard... against fretfulness and impatience.”<sup>163</sup> Parents must persist. “Drop a word for every day, and often in a day,” he urges. “Repeat your pious instructions and admonitions, even though your children grow up to years of maturity without appearing to *profit by them*.” God may yet add a “divine efficacy” to your lessons which for many years have been attended in vain.”<sup>164</sup>

Baxter also warns that

it is a most pernicious thing to children when they hear their parents speak contemptuously or lightly of holy things and persons, and irreverently talk of God, and Scripture, and the life to come, or speak dispraisingly or scornfully of godly ministers or people, or make a jest of the particular duties of a religious life: these children are like to receive that prejudice or profane

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>162</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 394.

<sup>163</sup> Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 207; so also Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 394.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 208-209 (my emphasis).

contempt into their hearts betimes, which may bolt the doors against the love of God and holiness, and make their salvation a work of much greater difficulty, and much smaller hope.<sup>165</sup>

Rather, he concludes (his Direction VIII regarding the duties of parents),

The whole skill of parents for the holy education of their children, doth consist in this, to make them conceive of holiness as the most amiable and desirable life; which is by representing it to them in words and practice, not only as most necessary, but also as most profitable, honourable, and delightful.<sup>166</sup>

Negatively Baxter would have parents denounce with vehemence “the brutish baseness and sinfulness of flesh-pleasing sensuality.” Young people are plagued with the natural depravity common to all to which is added an almost complete absence of reason, or so little as to be “almost useless.” “Speak bitterly to them against gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of sport.”<sup>167</sup>

iii. Acquaint your children with the *works of God*, says Swinnock, “his doings as well as his sayings.”<sup>168</sup> Citing Psalms 111:4 and 78:2-7, he has in mind national mercies and personal mercies, as when God has heard our cries for help and delivered us from trouble.

iv. *Pray* earnestly for your children.

Baxter cites general commands to pray, applying them to parents (e.g. 2 Tim 2:8; 1 Thess 5:17, 18; Col 4:2; Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18). Swinnock urges, “So do thou by prayer carry thy children to the blessed Jesus in the arms of faith, – he hath as tender a respect for children now as he had then.”<sup>169</sup> Parents, says Doddridge, are to be “earnestly entreating the God of grace to send down on your rising offspring the effusions of that blessed Spirit which was purchased by the blood of Christ, and is deposited in His compassionate hand.” He urges, “Let it be your constant errand at the throne of grace to plead for your children there. *Wrestle with God in secret for the life of their souls.*”<sup>170</sup>

v. *Reprove* and *correct* your children.<sup>171</sup> This would include corporal punishment. Gouge regards the rod as “the last remedy,” yet one “which may do good when nothing else can.”<sup>172</sup> “Better Whipt, than Damn’d,” said Cotton Mather.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:451.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:451.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, I:409.

<sup>169</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, I:411.

<sup>170</sup> Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 224-225; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 135-136.

<sup>171</sup> See Gouge, *Domestic Duties*, 402-408.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>173</sup> Cited in Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 103.



Our authors cite passages such as these:

*Whoever spares the rod hates his son,  
but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him. (Prov 13:24)*

*Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,  
but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. (Prov 22:15)*

<sup>13</sup> *Do not withhold discipline from a child;  
if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.*

<sup>14</sup> *If you strike him with the rod,  
you will save his soul from Sheol. (Prov 23:13, 14)*

*The rod and reproof give wisdom,  
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. (Prov 29:15)*

Citing the latter of these texts, Gouge explains that the rod gives wisdom “for it maketh children observe, what is good and what is evil; what is commendable, and what is blameworthy: and accordingly to do the good, and leave the evil, which is a great point of wisdom.”<sup>174</sup> Use the rod, says John Trapp (1601-1669), commenting on Proverbs 22:15, “to chase away evil by chastisement, seasoned with admonition, and seconded with prayer.”<sup>175</sup> Morgan cites first generation New Englander and “Apostle to the Indians” John Eliot’s praise of maternal rod-wielding:

The gentle rod of the mother, is a very gentle thing, it will break neither bone nor skin: yet by the blessing of God with it, and upon the wise application of it: it would break the bond that bindeth up corruption in the heart.”<sup>176</sup>

Words are often disregarded by children, and fail to do as much good as “a little correction,” says Gouge. “They are much more sensible of smart, than of words.”<sup>177</sup> Morgan also cites a diary entry of New Englander Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) in which he describes correcting his son Joseph, future minister of Old South Church in Boston, for particularly bad behavior. Joseph had thrown

a knop of Brass and hit his Sister Betty on the forehead so as to make it bleed and swell; upon which, for his playing at Prayer-time, and eating when Return Thanks, I whip him pretty smartly.<sup>178</sup>

Note that Proverbs 23:13, 14 connects salvation to corporal punishment, an insight not lost on our authors. Foolish parents, says Trapp, are “parricides” rather than parents, since “by not saving their children they slay them.”<sup>179</sup> Swinnock urges,

---

<sup>174</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 404.

<sup>175</sup> John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, Volumes I-V (1647; 1865-68; Eureka, CA: Tansky Publications, 1997), III:109.

<sup>176</sup> Cited in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 103.

<sup>177</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 403-404.

<sup>178</sup> Cited in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 103.

<sup>179</sup> Trapp, *Commentary*, III:112.

The rod on earth may keep him from the rack in hell, correction here may prevent his execution hereafter.<sup>180</sup>

The authors provide specific guidance for the discipline of children.

1. *Aim to break their will.* How will one's children ever get to the point where they will pray with Jesus, "Not my will but Thy will be done?" It begins with the submission of their wills to their parents wills. There they learn that their will is not supreme but must be surrendered to others and especially to Another. The goal, then, is "exact obedience to yourselves," says Baxter, and to "break them of their own will."<sup>181</sup> He explains,

To be obedient is to renounce their own wills, and to be ruled by their parents' or governor's wills; to use them therefore to (i.e. get them used to) have their own wills, is to teach them disobedience, and harden and use them to a kind of impossibility of obeying.<sup>182</sup>

Yet Baxter cautions that parents must be sure that the children "perceive that you dearly love them," for only then, "they will obey you the more willingly."<sup>183</sup>

2. *Begin early*

"Youth is an ocean of dangers," Swinnock warns.<sup>184</sup>

Those deepest purple sins many times are those which are dyed in the wool of youth. Of the sad aches which many have when they are old, by falls which they received when they were young! Let me never, like Eli, honour my sons (or servants) above my God, lest my God judge my house for ever for the iniquities which I know, because my children (or servants) make themselves vile, and I restraint them not. Lord, let me never be so fond and foolish as to kill any in my family with soul-damning kindness; but let my house be as thine ark, wherein there may be not only the golden pot of manna, seasonable and profitable instructions, but also Aaron's rod, suitable and proper reprehension and correction."<sup>185</sup>

Consequently, discipline must begin when children are young, that they might avoid youthful foolishness. Repeatedly we find biblical laments or cautions regarding the sins of youth (e.g. Ps 25:7; 119:9; Job 13:26; 2 Tim 2:22; Jer 3:25). Flavel concurs: "What a critical and dangerous season youth is."<sup>186</sup> Baxter warns, "I am forced to judge that most of the children of the godly that are ever renewed are renewed in their

---

<sup>180</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:435 (based on Prov 23:13); see also Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 121, 122.

<sup>181</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:450.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:398.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, I:361.

<sup>186</sup> Flavel, *Mystery of Providence*, 54.

childhood.”<sup>187</sup> Not only should positive instruction begin early, but so also should negative correction.

### 3. *Be consistent*

Parents must not allow fatigue or fondness to interfere with the consistent application of discipline. “Over-much lenity is very great cruelty,” says Gouge.<sup>188</sup> The failure of the high priest Eli is often cited (1 Sam 2:12-36; 3:13).<sup>189</sup> Swinnock warns the negligent:

Those that neglected to scourge their children, have found their children to scourge them. Such children, instead of giving rest, have been a sharp rod to their parents. As Eli’s children, who were reprov’d too late, and then but very little, they pierc’d his heart for his not punishing them. God often whips the fathers by those children that were unwhipped at first. Not to cross our children is a speedy way to be crossed by them.<sup>190</sup>

Some parents kill their children with kindness, with fondness, which is cruelty to purpose, I would say. Witness David in his carriage or dotage towards Absalom and Adonijah. True affection will be known by seasonable and suitable correction. ‘He that spareth his rod hateth his son; he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes’ (Prov 13:24). Some children have been killed with overlaying. Many a mother hath overlaid and pressed her child to death with fondness. True love, though it be inconsistent with hatred, yet it is not with anger. God himself, who is infinite in affection to his people, makes them often feel the effects of his indignation. ‘Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth’ (Prov 3:12). Nay, none love their children’s souls so much, as they that are most angry at their sins.<sup>191</sup>

Packer cites Gaius Davies, “Parents must not, like apes, kill their young ones with hugging.”<sup>192</sup>

### 4. *Be balanced.* Swinnock counsels,

As some men are all fondness, and err in the excess; so others are all fire, and err in the defect: thy wisdom, Christian, is to walk in the middle way between both; as not to suffer thy children in sin, lest they be destroyed; so not to provoke them to wrath, lest they be discouraged.<sup>193</sup>

Citing Ephesians 6:4’s warning not to exasperate or provoke one’s children, Gouge urges,

---

<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 83; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 119, 128; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 397.

<sup>188</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 404

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. 13, 392, 397, 402, 407.

<sup>190</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:414; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 116, 122.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, I:413.

<sup>192</sup> Packer, *Quest*, 27; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 121.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, I:414; also Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:453.

Under this word are forbidden all such things as may kindle wrath in children, as too must austerity in carriage, sourness in countenance, threatening and reviling in words, too hard handling, too severe correction, too much restraint of liberty, too small allowance of things needful, with the like.<sup>194</sup>

5. Don't show *partiality*. George Hamond (1620-1705) calls it "unnatural" and "irreligious" to indulge some children and neglect others.<sup>195</sup> Never should one child be favored over another.

6. *Calibrate* your discipline according to the temperaments of your children.<sup>196</sup> Some need only a word. Others require the rod. "Parents must fit your dealings to their dispositions," says Baxter.<sup>197</sup> Ryken cites Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672): "Diverse children have their different natures." Consequently, "Those parents are wise that can fit their nurture according to their nature."<sup>198</sup>

7. Set a *good pattern*. Swinnock provides the age-old wisdom:

Children will observe their fathers' courses and carriage, and sooner follow their poisonous patterns, than their pious precepts.<sup>199</sup>

Gouge warns carnal parents that "the left hand of evil example soon pulleth down more than the right hand of instruction can build up."<sup>200</sup> So also Baxter warns:

They will sooner believe your bad lives than your good words.<sup>201</sup>

"The example of a father is acknowledged to be all important," says American J. W. Alexander (1804-1859). "The stream must not be expected to rise higher than the fountain."<sup>202</sup>

## 2. With reference to their *bodies and temporal estates*

i) Provide for them the *necessities of physical life*.

ii) Yet insist on *moderation*. "Keep a strict guard upon their appetites," Baxter warns. Monitor the quantity and availability of their food. Those who do not restrain their children's appetites "destroy their souls by accustoming them to gluttony, and to be ruled by their appetites."<sup>203</sup> Those who love the souls of their children will teach them temperance from infancy: to eat

---

<sup>194</sup>Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 113-114.

<sup>195</sup> George Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship* (1694; Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 55.

<sup>196</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:453; Ryken cites Richard Greenham (1535-1594), Eleazer Mather (1637-1669) and Benjamin Wadsworth to the same end.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:423.

<sup>198</sup> Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 83; he cites Samuel Willard and Richard Greenham as well; see also Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 107, 108.

<sup>199</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:416.

<sup>200</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 397.

<sup>201</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, 1:453.

<sup>202</sup> J.W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (1847; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 49; see also Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 118, 132; Doddridge, "Religious Education," 219-220.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:451.

sparingly, to eat a coarser rather than a finer diet, and not allow them to eat or drink between meals.

iii) Allow a much *sports and recreations* as will be conducive of their health and cheerfulness (“health of body and alacrity of mind,” in Baxter’s terms), yet not so much as many carry away their minds from better things.<sup>204</sup> “Keep them from gaming for money, from cards, dice, and stage-plays, play-books, and love-books, and foolish wanton tasks and ballads.”<sup>205</sup>

iv) Root out the *sin of pride* by commending “humility and plainness,” by speaking shamefully of fine clothing, boasting, and the riches of this world. “Let their apparel be plain, decent, and warm, but not gaudy” or “such as useth to signify pride or tempt people to it.”<sup>206</sup> Speak of wealth, of grand houses and gallantry (!) as “the devil’s baits,” says Baxter, “to entice poor sinners to love this world.”<sup>207</sup>

v) Keep them from *bad company*, Baxter warns, “especially of ungodly play fellows.”<sup>208</sup> “Wicked children,” he counsels, “will infect them with their wicked tongues and practices; they will quickly teach them to drink, to game, to talk filthily, to swear, to mock at godliness and sobriety.”<sup>209</sup> The problem is especially acute in common (i.e. public) schools because they have so “many rude and ungodly ill-taught children in (them).”<sup>210</sup> Children will tend to imitate what they see in other children. Parents’ spiritual aspirations for their children may be frustrated by the influence of their classmates. “When you have watched over them at home as narrowly as you can,” Baxter warns, “they are infected abroad with such beastly vices, as they are hardly ever after cured of.”<sup>211</sup>

He recommends educating children at home or in “private and well ordered schools.”<sup>212</sup> Particular care should be taken to one’s choice of schoolmasters, tutors, and teachers. Gouge warns, “Children oft learn such evil qualities of the school-masters as they can never shake off again.” Gouge outlines the three main duties of teachers (schoolmasters) and tutors.

1. *Learning*, including training in a proper calling
2. *Civility*, that is, good manners
3. *Piety*, and the doctrine of true religion

He warns that “school masters commonly cast the first seed into the hearts of children.”<sup>213</sup> Consequently, choice of schools and teachers must be undertaken with great care. Then again, many who are well taught at school go on to university and “utterly lose the benefit of all their former education” because of bad instructors and “idle and lewd companions.”<sup>214</sup> As for those

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 1:452.

<sup>205</sup> Baxter, “Poor Man’s Family Book,” *Works*, 4:234.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:452; citing Luke 16 and Psalm 10:3.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Baxter, “Poor Man’s Family Book,” *Works*, 4:234.

<sup>210</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:452; see also Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 218-219; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 135.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 430.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 396; 431.

who send their children to popish or profane countries to learn the fashions and customs of the world, “I had rather make a chimney-sweep of my son than be guilty of doing so much to sell or betray him to the devil,” says Baxter.<sup>215</sup> “Be sure,” then, “that you engage your children in good company.”<sup>216</sup>

vi) As for the opposite sex: “Be sure when they grow towards ripeness, that you keep them from opportunity, nearness, or familiarity, with tempting persons of another sex.”<sup>217</sup>

vii) Teach them a *lawful calling*. Baxter urges parents to “choose such a calling and course of life for your children, as tendeth most to the saving of their souls, and to their public usefulness for church and state.”<sup>218</sup>

Swinnock warns,

They who are brought up to no trade are usually brought up to Satan’s black art; idle young men are loose, and so at leisure to be taken into the devil’s service. A lawful calling hinders the commission of many a sin, and prevents many a temptation. Standing pools do quickly putrify. If the sea did not purge itself by continual motion, it would corrupt the air. The air, if it were not moved to and fro by the winds, would infect the inhabitants. Idleness breeds all manner of wickedness.<sup>219</sup>

viii) “Dispose of them in marriage” (Jer 29:6), says Swinnock.<sup>220</sup> The choice of a mate should not be left to the children alone. The example of Abraham (Gen 24:4), Isaac (Gen 28:2), and Naomi (Ruth 3:1), are often cited. Religious characteristics of a mate are vital, but such matters as disparity of age or wealth are considered as well.<sup>221</sup> “Often they choose for themselves to their own undoing,” Baxter warns, “for they choose not by judgment, but blind affection.”<sup>222</sup> Be sure that godliness is at the foundation of the match.

Before thou lookest into the world for a wife for thy son, look up to God for his direction. Do not expect God’s company at the wedding except he be invited by prayer, and also have a hand in the match. Let piety, not portion, be the first particular thou inquires after. If riches be the ground of their love, when that oil is consumed the lamp will be extinguished. If outward beauty cause that flame, when a disease or old age hath removed the fuel the fire will go out. But if godliness or spiritual riches be the motive of conjugal love, it will last for ever; for the beauty of grace doth never decay, though the grace of beauty doth; and spiritual riches are durable, and as immortal as any spirits. I do not deny, reader, but it is lawful in the choice of a wife to have some regard to portion and

---

<sup>215</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:452.

<sup>216</sup> Baxter, “Poor Man’s Family Book,” *Works*, 4:234; Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 216-218.

<sup>217</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:454.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:454.

<sup>219</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:400; Ryken cites the laws of New England as well as Benjamin Wadsworth, *Worldly Saints*, 79, 80; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 390-1, 396, 409-11.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, I:423.

<sup>221</sup> E.g. Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 412-14.

<sup>222</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:454.

proportion, but it should be after, not before piety... let not wealth, nor wit, nor beauty, but grace strike the match.”<sup>223</sup>

How does one determine the character of a potential spouse? Watch how they act in public and in private, how they talk, how they dress, who they choose as friends, and how they occupy their time. “The report, the looks, the speech, the apparel, and the companions... are like the pulses that show whether be well or ill,” says Henry Smith (1607-1687).<sup>224</sup> “Choose such for they life companion,” says Robert Cleaver (d. 1613), “as hath chosen company like thee before.”<sup>225</sup>

### *Parental hopes*

Can we expect good results from our labors as parents? Indeed. Is this not the promise of Genesis 17:7? Will not our God be our God and our children’s? Does He not promise to be such? Is not the gospel promise for us and for our children (Acts 2:39)? Shall “posterity” not serve Him? Shall the “coming generation” not be “told of the Lord” and shall they not “proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn” (Ps 22:30, 31 cf 71:18; Joel 1:3)? Has God not promised,

*<sup>3</sup> For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants.*

*<sup>4</sup> They shall spring up among the grass  
like willows by flowing streams.*

*<sup>5</sup> This one will say, ‘I am the LORD’s,’  
another will call on the name of Jacob,  
and another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’  
and name himself by the name of Israel.’” (Isa 44:3-5)*

Hildersham is not concerned that children may not understand the catechism or Scripture lessons. Understanding will come later, as it did with Jesus’ disciples, as John tells us (Jn 2:22; 12:16). With understanding will come the good that accompanies understanding. Moreover, parents should be encouraged. Proverbs 22:6 promises that “when he is old he will not depart from it,” that is, from “the way he should go.” “The wise man assure us,” says Doddridge, “that we may reasonably expect the most happy consequence from it.” What about the old saying, Many a young saint was proved to be an old devil? Hildersham also cites Proverbs 22:6, now comparing a young child to a vessel that long retains the savor of the liquid with which it is first seasoned.<sup>226</sup> Doddridge, continuing in his expositions of Proverbs 22:6 speaks of the parental training of children having a “fair probability” of succeeding, given that it is both “a very rational method,” and “a method which He has crowned with singular success.”<sup>227</sup>

What can be said to Christian parents who see no fruit from their labors to instruct their children?

---

<sup>223</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:424.

<sup>224</sup> Cited in Packer, *Quest*, 268.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 130-131.

<sup>227</sup> Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 197-198, cf 183-184.

Swinnock recognizes that the benefits of a Christian education may be delayed:

Their pious education may be profitable, though not presently. The good seed thou now sowest, may yield a blessed crop, though a nipping winter should come between; however, thou hast delivered thy own soul; the master hath his quarterage, whether his scholar learn or loiter, and the physician hath his fee, whether the patient recover or die.<sup>228</sup>

## Family Worship

Family worship was universally insisted upon by previous generations of Reformed Protestants. John Newton (1725-1807), for example, author of the beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace,” regarded family worship as “a duty and a privilege” as well as a “universal obligation.”<sup>229</sup> This is the characteristic view of the Reformed Church. Liturgical scholar Horton Davies (1916-2005) attributes the rise of family worship to “the new significance given to the family by the Reformers.”<sup>230</sup> Its roots may be traced back to Reformation Geneva and behind them to the church fathers. Calvin states the ideal in his commentary on 1 Corinthians published in 1546 (Latin) and 1547 (French). Commenting on 1 Corinthians 16:19 and “the church in their house,” that is, the house of Aquila and Priscilla, he speaks of how “wonderful” it is that the title “church” should be applied to a single family, and indeed adds, “It is fitting that all the families of believers should be organized in such a way as to be *so many little churches*.”<sup>231</sup> Calvin’s *Genevan Catechism* of 1542-45 included five prayers for use at home at the beginning and end of each day and at mealtimes. The printer Jean Rivery in 1561 borrowed a number of these prayers to develop a family devotional liturgy, a “family worship book” if you will, to be used morning and evening. Calvin’s role in developing this is unclear, “but he certainly approved of parents and family heads leading their households in worship,” says Calvin scholar Elsie Anne McKee.<sup>232</sup>

From this humble beginning, family worship developed into a normative practice among Protestants, achieving confessional status in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) which teaches that God is to be worshipped “in private families daily”(XXI.6). It is noteworthy that the *Confession* was first published with an introduction addressed “To the Christian Reader, *Especially Heads of Families*” (my emphasis), as well as Thomas Manton’s (1620-1677) “Epistle to the Reader,” similarly urging family religion. “A family is the seminary of Church

---

<sup>228</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:403.

<sup>229</sup> John Newton, “Family Worship,” *The Letters of John Newton* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 88.

<sup>230</sup> Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (1948; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 278; Oliver Heywood and others see evidence for family worship in the writings of Basil (330-379), Chrysostom (349-407), Cyprian (200-258), Augustine (354-430), and others (“The Family Altar,” *The Whole Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*, Volumes I-V [1825; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1999], IV:332); Church historian Philip Schaff (1819-1893) cites Chrysostom’s advocacy that every house should be a church (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [1867, 1910; Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994 reproduction of fifth edition, revised], 3:545).

<sup>231</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, translator John W. Fraser, Calvin’s Commentaries (1546, 1547; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 356.

<sup>232</sup> Elsie Anne McKee (ed.), *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 210.



and State,” said Manton; “and if children be not well principled there, all miscarrieth.”<sup>233</sup> Immediately upon adopting the *Confession*, the Scottish Presbyterians adopted a “Directory for Family-Worship” as well, prefaced by an Act of the General Assembly that warned of excommunication of any head of household who neglected “this necessary duty.”<sup>234</sup> Manton, citing Baxter, describes neglect of family worship as “covenant-breaking with God, and betraying the souls of their children to the devil.”<sup>235</sup>

“What the liturgy of the hours was for monks of the Middle Ages, the discipline of family prayer was for the Puritans,” says Hughes O. Old. He continues, “The Puritans, whether on the Connecticut frontier or in the heart of London, whether they were Cambridge scholars or Shropshire cotters, gave great importance to maintaining a daily discipline of family prayer.”<sup>236</sup> Commonly the later Reformers and Puritans referred to the family as a “little church,” beginning at least with Calvin (1509-1564), William Perkins (1558-1602), known widely as the father of English Puritanism, and Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), the father of English Presbyterianism.<sup>237</sup> Richard Baxter (1615-1691), writing in his *Christian Directory*, maintains that “a Christian family is a church.”<sup>238</sup> William Gurnall (1617-1679), in his classic *The Christian in Complete Armour*, summarizes the historic Reformed understanding of the duties of “family religion”:

The church began at first in a family, and was preserved by the godly care of parents in instructing their children and household in the truths of God, whereby the knowledge of God was transmitted from generation to generation, and though now the church is not confined to such strait limits, yet every private family is as a little nursery to the church.<sup>239</sup>

Matthew Henry, who is so many ways represents the apex of Reformed pastoral theology, devoted a sermon to the subject, entitled “A Church in the House.” The family, he says, “is the nursery in which the trees of righteousness are reared, and afterwards are planted in the courts of our God.” Heads of households, he urges, “must be as prophets, priests, and kings in their own

---

<sup>233</sup> Thomas Manton, “Mr. Thomas Manton’s Epistle to the Reader,” *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Inverness: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985).

<sup>234</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 418; Heywood agrees that those who do not conduct family prayer are “not fit to be communicants” (“Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:366).

<sup>235</sup> Manton, “Epistle,” 8.

<sup>236</sup> Hughes O. Old, “Matthew Henry and the Puritan Discipline of Family Prayer,” in John Leith (ed.), *Calvin Studies*, VII, “Papers Presented at a Colloquium on Calvin Studies,” Davidson College, Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Davidson, NC, Jan. 28-29, 1994, 69; Of late, Roman Catholics have begun emphasizing the importance of family prayers. In the book of *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, Christian homes are referred to as “little churches” in which “prayer must happen... if the Sunday assembly is to become a community of prayer” (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1988, 4). The Journal of the Liturgical Conference, *Liturgy*, devoted an issue to the subject of “Little Churches: Ritual in the Home” (Vol. 21, Nov. 4, 2006).

<sup>237</sup> William Perkins, *Oeconomic, or Household Government: A Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family, according to the Scriptures* (1609; London: John Haviland, 1631), 670. This is soon to be published in Volume 10 of his collected works by Reformation Heritage Books.

<sup>238</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works* 1:418.

<sup>239</sup> William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, (1662 and 1665; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), I:164.

families; and as such they must keep up family doctrine, family worship and family discipline.”<sup>240</sup>

Similarly, the early American Presbyterian, Samuel Davies (1723-1761), refers to the family as “the nursery of the church and state.”<sup>241</sup> This too was typical of Reformed commentators up to the recent past. Southern Presbyterian Benjamin M. Palmer (1818-1902) describes the family as “the original society from which the state emerges, and the church, and every other association known amongst men.”<sup>242</sup> Currently in print are a veritable “Who’s Who” of historic Reformed authors who commend in the strongest terms the discipline of daily (typically twice daily!) family devotions. In addition to Perkins, Manton, Baxter, Gurnall, Henry, Davies, Newton, and Palmer, we may cite Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), who may perhaps be regarded as the father of English Puritanism, William Perkins (1558-1602), often regarded as the Father of English Puritanism, Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632), William Gouge (1575-1653),<sup>243</sup> George Hamond (1620-1705),<sup>244</sup> Thomas Lye (1621-1684),<sup>245</sup> Samuel Lee (1625-1691),<sup>246</sup> Oliver Heywood (1630-1702),<sup>247</sup> Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707),<sup>248</sup> Philip Doddridge (1702-1751),<sup>249</sup> George Whitefield (1714-1770),<sup>250</sup> J. W. Alexander (1804-1859),<sup>251</sup> and Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813-1843).<sup>252</sup> Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) considered “family order” so important that he included in his “Farewell Sermon” to the Northampton, Massachusetts congregation that had just fired him this charge:

Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief of the means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual. If these are maintained, all the means of grace will be likely to prosper and be successful.<sup>253</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” in *Works*, I:251, 252; Swinnock says of the head of household: “He is a priest to pray for them, a prophet to instruct them, and a king to govern them according to God’s word” ( “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:380); also Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 287, 392.

<sup>241</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” in *Godly Family*, 1.

<sup>242</sup> Benjamin M. Palmer, *The Family in its Civil and Churchly Aspects* (1876; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1981), 9; he adds, “In the Family are to be found both the State and the Church in embryo” (209).

<sup>243</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*.

<sup>244</sup> Hamond, *Case for Family Worship*,

<sup>245</sup> Thomas Lye, “By What Scriptural Rules May Catechizing Be So Managed as That It May Become Most Universally Profitable,” in *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689* (1844; Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), II:99ff.

<sup>246</sup> Samuel Lee, “What Means May Be Used towards the Concession of Our Carnal Relations,” in *Puritan Sermons*, I:142ff.

<sup>247</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, I:285-418.

<sup>248</sup> Thomas Doolittle, “How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family,” in *Puritan Sermons*, I:194ff.

<sup>249</sup> Philip Doddridge, “Religious Education,” *Godly Family*.

<sup>250</sup> George Whitefield, “The Great Duty of Family Religion,” in Kistler (ed.), *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993).

<sup>251</sup> Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*.

<sup>252</sup> Robert Murray M’Cheyne, “Family Government,” *Additional Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1984).

<sup>253</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (1834; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), ccvi; also Heywood: “Christian families are churches” (“Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:320); Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 11.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, books of family prayers regularly were published and denominational periodicals regularly contributed devotional helps for families.<sup>254</sup> Vigorous warnings were issued by the older authors against the negligent. “If in your houses God hath not a church, the devil will have a chapel,” Doolittle warned. “If your houses be not nurseries for heaven, they will be breeding places for hell.”<sup>255</sup> Virtually the whole weight of Protestant history testifies to the importance of family worship.

Henry, on the other hand, encourages us saying,

If you make conscience of doing your duty, by keeping up family doctrine, —if you teach them the good and the right way, and warn them of by-paths, —if you reprove, exhort, and encourage them as there is occasion, —if you pray with them, and for them, and set them a good example, and at last consult their soul’s welfare in the disposal of them, you have done your part, and may comfortably leave the issue and success with God.

Again, he says,

God will be with you in a way of mercy while you are with him in a way of duty.<sup>256</sup>

### ***Setting of family worship: the godly home***

If family worship is to be beneficial, it must be conducted in the context of parental devotion to Christ. The example of parents is crucial. Parental baptismal vows wisely begin with parents endeavoring to provide “a godly example” for their children.<sup>257</sup> The context within which the promises of God for our children are given is that of the godly home. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 envisions a home in which the things of God dominate:

*4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4-9, cf 4:9, 10; 5:29; 11:19; 28:4)*

Love for God fills the heart of the parents (6:4), as do the *commands* of God (6:4-6). Talk of God is the overflow of the heart. “These words” of God “shall be on your heart.” Spiritual things are pursued not legalistically, or formally, but enthusiastically. “He that loves God,” says Matthew

---

<sup>254</sup> Ron Parrish’s considerable yet undoubtedly incomplete collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century books for family worship includes 26 titles which we have included in the back of this chapter.

<sup>255</sup> Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:258.

<sup>256</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, I:254, 259.

<sup>257</sup> “Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him/her), and you will teach (him/her) the doctrine of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God’s appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? (Vow #3, *The Book of Church Order*, Presbyterian Church in America)

Henry, “loves his Bible.”<sup>258</sup> “Religion” is not a Sunday morning thing which bears no relation to the rest of the week. Rather, it is an all-day, everyday thing, “when you lie down, and when you rise,” and every moment in between. Moses envisions that the things of God will be the stuff of informal conversation all throughout the day. Parents are capable of having these conversations and are inclined, even eager to do so. They manifest a pervasive love for God and His word.<sup>259</sup>

The parental pattern of *behavior* is vital. Parental hypocrisy will be detected quickly. Parental inconsistency will be exploited early. “Your evil example,” says Hamond, will “prejudice them more than your instructions and prayers will edify them.”<sup>260</sup> Henry entitles Psalm 101 “the house-holder’s psalm,” noting the commitment which David, as head of his house, makes:

*I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;  
I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.* (Ps 101:2b-3a)<sup>261</sup>

He is responsible for both his own conduct, that it be exemplary, and that his household be kept free of evil: “I will know nothing of evil” (Ps 101:4)

George Swinnock in his classic “The Christian Man’s Calling,” says of their father’s example that children will “sooner follow their poisonous patterns than their pious precepts.”<sup>262</sup> Likewise Richard Baxter warns, “They will sooner believe your bad lives than your good words.”<sup>263</sup> “They are prone to imitate practices than to learn principles,” adds the Puritan Thomas Lye (1621-1684).<sup>264</sup> J. C. Ryle cites Archbishop Tillotson (1630-1694):

“To give children good instruction and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them in the way to hell.”<sup>265</sup>

Parents teach by modeling holy living. As they exhibit sacrificial love, honesty, integrity, the fruit of the Spirit, and the Beatitudes, they teach. They are meant to be examples of Christ to their children, not perfectly, but truly. This is the environment in which the Christian message has integrity, in which the parental faith has credibility in the outlook of the children.

The parental pattern of *commitment* is also vital. The children will early perceive if parents are committed to love in the marriage, or merely tolerate each other. The children will soon know if their parents are committed to God with *all their heart, soul, and mind*, or if other gods are tolerated, indeed come first before God (Deut 6:5). Children will quickly detect if their parents are committed to the church and its ministry, or if the church may safely be jettisoned if something better, more exciting, or more fun comes along. There is no replacing the parental role. Their example is vital.

---

<sup>258</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, on Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.

<sup>259</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 395.

<sup>260</sup> Hamond, *Family Worship*, xviii.

<sup>261</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, introductory comments on Psalm 101; see also Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:146; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 395.

<sup>262</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I: 416.

<sup>263</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works*, 1:453.

<sup>264</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:125.

<sup>265</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Duties of Parents* (Sand Springs, OH: Grace and Truth Books, 2002; first published in *The Upper Room: Being Truth for the Times*. London: William Hunt & Co., 1888), 27.

What we say to our children is important. This is not being denied for a moment. However, our words must be built on the foundation of our deeds. What we profess must be matched by how we act. Parents know that what they say to their children goes in one ear and out the other. What we teach must be repeated over and over again. Emily was 20 years old when we were married. For years later her mother would say, “You got her too soon. I wasn’t finished with her yet.” Consistent instruction, even after a period of 20 years, joined to a life that matches that instruction, is a crucial ingredient in nurturing our children in the Lord’s discipline and instruction.

For a parent to say, “Do as I say, not as I do,” is an exercise in futility. For a smoker to say, “Don’t smoke” or a drunkard to say, “Don’t drink” rarely works. For parents to drop their children for Sunday School and expect them to take “religion” seriously is foolhardy. What is being modeled will defeat what is being urged. Children are sharp enough to see the reality or the lack thereof behind the words. What parents truly believe is true or important is evident in their actions, which as the saying goes, speak louder than words. “Do not forget,” Ryle warns us, “that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. No school will make such deep marks on character as home. Imitation is a far stronger principle than memory.”<sup>266</sup>

### *Arguments for family worship*

How do they and we make the case for family worship? They recognize that there isn’t a single passage or command that requires it. Hamond in particular rebuffs those who demand “to express words of Scripture” and like the Sadducees in connection with the resurrection of the dead (Mt 22:32-32), fail to draw proper deductions from Scripture, thereby missing what “by sound and necessary consequences” can be known from Scripture.<sup>267</sup> Rather, they argue on the basis of the implications of the biblical examples of parental responsibility for the religious disposition of the family, as well as right deductions based on the nature of things.

### *Biblical case: Old Testament*

We may begin with the Old Testament examples of family religion. “Religion was first hatched in families,” says Manton, “and there the devil seeketh to crush it.” There was a time, he argues, when “the families of the Patriarchs were all the Churches God had in the world.”<sup>268</sup> Abel offered a sacrifice that pleased God (Gen 4:4). Where did he learn to do so? Such knowledge would have to have been passed on to him by his father Adam (cf Gen 3:21). True religion was passed from Adam to Seth to Enosh. From father to son what it meant to “call upon the name of the Lord” was transmitted (Gen 4:25, 26). We are also told, Enoch “walked with God” (Gen 5:24). Where did he learn to do so? Enoch fathered Methuselah, Methuselah fathered Lamech, and Lamech fathered Noah, who also “walked with God” (Gen 6:9). From father to son, the knowledge of a godly walk was passed along.

---

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Hamond, *Family Worship*, 94, 93.

<sup>268</sup> Manton, “Epistle,” 7.

Abraham was commended as one who “command(ed) his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice,” a text featured prominently in the literature (Gen 18:19).<sup>269</sup> As head of the household, he *commanded* his children to “keep the way of the Lord.” Does this not assume that he *knows* “the way of the Lord?” Would the “way of the Lord” not include comprehensive instruction in the attributes, nature, commands, requirements, and worship of the Lord? He adds, “by doing righteousness and justice.” Does this not require that Abraham *teach* his children what is meant by “righteousness” and “justice?” “Abraham will not leave his children... to their own genius, counsels, lusts, ignorance, idleness, superstitions, idolatry, but ‘command’ them,” says Thomas Lye in his sermon on “Profitable Catechizing.”<sup>270</sup> He must teach his children comprehensively the things of God. The responsibility is Abraham’s. There is no school to which he may turn. There is no church to which he may delegate the responsibility. There is no Sunday School to which he may send his children.

Isaac and Jacob built altars wherever their families pitched their tents, the altar being “a necessary utensil for divine worship” (Gen 26:25; 28:18; 33:20; 35:1-3), says Davies.<sup>271</sup> The latter of these texts was the basis upon which Oliver Heywood (1624-1702) wrote his 133 page treatise, *A Family Altar*, (1693), where he demonstrates that Jacob, “as a householder” (Gen. 35: 2, 3), by teaching his family its duty (v 3), by building an altar and making an offering (v 14), and by commanding his family to put away idols (v 4), “acts the part of a *prophet, priest, and king*.”<sup>272</sup> This Jacob did wherever he went, as did Abraham and Israel before him. This leads Heywood to the conclusion, “that governors of families must as priests erect family-altars for God’s worship.”<sup>273</sup> Lye summarizes the pattern of religious instruction from Adam to Moses: “how was the true religion communicated, but by oral tradition from parents to their children.”<sup>274</sup>

As we move from the Abrahamic to the Mosaic covenant, we read this exhortation from Moses to parents:

*‘And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ’You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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. (Deut 6:6, 7; 11:19, etc.).*

“Means are here prescribed for the maintaining and keeping up of religion in our hearts and houses,” says Matthew Henry.<sup>275</sup> Both the heart and the house are in view. “Diligently” parents are to teach the children to love (Deut 6:4) and obey God (6:7). They are constantly to teach them to do so. Hebrew expresses comprehensiveness through contrasts. When we “sit” and when we “walk,” when we “lie down” and when we “rise” represent *all of life* and *all the time*. It

<sup>269</sup> E.g. Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 669, 698; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” *Godly Family*, 108, 116, 132; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 392; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:152; Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 226; Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 39, 42; Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 64; Davies, “Family Religion,” 17.

<sup>270</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:107.

<sup>271</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 18.

<sup>272</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar” *Works*, IV:285-418.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 297; see Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:238.

<sup>274</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:106.

<sup>275</sup> Henry, on Deuteronomy 6:6-7; also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 670, 698; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 110, 113, 125; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 392, 395, 401; Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:217; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:150, 151, 155; Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 126; Davies, “Family Religion,” 18.

means, says Matthew Poole, that this instruction is to be done “diligently, earnestly, frequently, discreetly, and dexterously.”<sup>276</sup>

*<sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:8, 9)*

Bibles were uncommon then. So they made do. They compensated by writing verses on their *doorposts* and *gates*, constantly reminding them of God’s word (cf Ex 13:9).

The things of God are to be the theme of our households, constantly before our eyes, constantly in our conversations, going with us wherever we go. Those who have completed Bibles in their hands may draw the necessary implications. The Scriptures are to be in the center of our homes, dominating family life.

This command to parents to teach their children is repeated three times in Deuteronomy, so important is their doing so for the future of the people of God (4:9, 10; 6:6, 7; 11:19; cf 32:46). Passover instruction was particularly the duty of families. “When your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover’” (Ex 12:26, 27a). The children ask, the parents explain. Parents were to tell their sons and grandsons of the mighty signs wrought by God in the exodus (Ex 10:1, 2). Parents were to teach their children the Ten Commandments (Deut 4:9, 10ff). Parents were to teach their children of the parting of the waters of the Red Sea and then the Jordan River as the people of Israel passed into the Promised Land (Josh 4:6, 7, 21, 22). If Old Testament parents were required to explain the work of redemption, the Ten Commandments, and the sacraments to their children, it is doubtful that Christian parents are expected to do any less. “The good ruler of his family,” says Hamond, “must then be a diligent and constant teacher of his household.”<sup>277</sup>

Joshua, though “very much in public affairs, yet neglects not his family,” Gouge points out. He thereby “setteth himself first as a guide to the rest.”<sup>278</sup> He committed his family to God saying, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15), the text upon which Thomas Doolittle based his sermon, “The Duty of Family Prayer,” and George Whitefield his sermon, “The Great Duty of Family Religion.”<sup>279</sup> Doolittle points out with multiple references that the term “to serve” is “so comprehensive as to take in the whole worship of God” (e.g. Ex 3:12; Deut 6:12; 1 Sam 7:3; Ps 2:11; etc; and Mt 4:10; Lk 1:74; Acts 7:7, etc.).<sup>280</sup> Whitefield argues from this text that “every governor of a family ought to look upon himself as obliged to act in three capacities: as a prophet to instruct; as a priest to pray for and with; as a king to govern, direct and

---

<sup>276</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Volumes I-III (1683-85, 1865; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), I:350.

<sup>277</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:313; Davies, “Family Religion,” 20, 21; Hamond, *Family Worship*, 29; cf Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:217.

<sup>278</sup> Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 13, 395.

<sup>279</sup> Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 30-47; see also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 669, 698; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 108, 111, 132; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:155; Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 64; Davies, “Family Religion,” 5; Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:316; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 13, 395.

<sup>280</sup> Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 200. He also points out that the Hebrew word “to save” in Joshua 24:15 (*abad*) is translated in the LXX by the word *latreuō*, “to worship.”

provide for them.” Further, “every house is, as it were, a little parish... every family a flock.”<sup>281</sup> Davies builds his case on 1 Timothy 5:8.

*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

The provision for the family which the Apostle requires surely may not be restricted to that which is merely physical or material. If one who fails to provide physical necessities of life is worse than an unbeliever, “What shall we say of him that restricts their souls?” he asks.<sup>282</sup>

We may point to the example of Job, of whom we read,

*And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually. (Job 1:5)*

Job “sent,” or sent a message to them, to “consecrate” themselves, a term used of preparing for the holy work of offering sacrifices (see Ex 19:22; 1 Sam 6:15; Jn 11:55).<sup>283</sup> “We find Job so intent upon family devotion that he rises up early in the morning and offers burnt-offerings” (Job 1:5), Davies notes.<sup>284</sup>

David, after restoring the ark to Jerusalem with a grand celebration, returned home to “bless his family,” for what Davies calls “his hour for family devotion” (2 Sam 6:20).<sup>285</sup> Daniel “went to his house” and “got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously” (Dan 6:10b), as was his custom. “He had always observed a stated course of devotion in his family,” says Davies.<sup>286</sup>

Parents are urged in Proverbs, the Bible’s ageless book of wisdom,

*Train up a child in the way he should go;  
even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6)*

“Train up,” “or catechize,” says Lye; “piously and prudently instruct and educate.”<sup>287</sup> Upon this text Thomas Lye based his sermon “Profitable Catechizing.” The “way” is literally “the mouth of his way,” meaning early, from the beginning. A form of the word “train” is used in Genesis 14:14 of Abram’s “trained” men, that is, men trained for warfare. The analogy of military training is useful. One trained for combat would have undergone extended instruction and repeated practice in the use of slings, shields, knives, spears, bows and arrows, as well as tactics

---

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 32, 33; cf Hamond, *Family Worship*, 103.

<sup>282</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 5; also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 670.

<sup>283</sup> See Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:107.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 18; see also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 699; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 136; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 396; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:155, 166; Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 34; Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 64; Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:317.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.; see also Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 64; Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:317.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.; see also Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Works*, 2:230; Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 35, 39.

<sup>287</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*; see also Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:151.



and strategy. David says, “Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who *trains* my hands for war, and my fingers for battle” (Ps 144:1).

A child is to be trained in the way he *should* go, not the way he *would* go, but the way his parents would have him go. What is the “way” that the child “should go?” Would this not have to be explained? Would the child not have to be “trained” in the way of truth? Would that not have to be contrasted with error? Would the child not have to be trained in the way of what is morally right, and would that not have to be contrasted with moral error? All this must be done early and constantly. This is what the Bible expects of parents while it promises that children will not “easily and ordinarily” depart from that way, as Poole explains.<sup>288</sup>

Listen to the psalmist:

*<sup>5</sup>He established a testimony in Jacob  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our fathers  
to teach to their children,  
<sup>6</sup>that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,  
<sup>7</sup>so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments; (Ps 78:5-7)*

This is a remarkable statement describing how the faith is to be transmitted from one generation to the next. God “commanded our fathers” to do what? “To teach their children” (Ps 78:5b). What are they to teach? God’s law, His *torah*, His fatherly instruction. To what immediate end? So that those children, when they have their own families, might “tell (the same) to their children,” and on to generation after generation (Ps 78:6). Teach to what *ultimate* end? “So that they should set their hope in God” (Ps 78:7a). The aim is that their children should know God to be One in whom they can hope, One who is good, and kind, and faithful, and just, and holy. Also, “that they should... not forget the works of God” (Ps 78:7b). They should know not only God’s character and attributes, but His redemptive works, His “glorious deeds and his might and the wonders he has done” (Ps 78:4). For the psalmist, this meant the exodus, the primary event of the Old Testament, but for us it means, in addition, the cross of Christ and all His benefits. They were also to be taught to “but keep his commandments” (Ps 78:7b). The laws, the commands, and the will and word of God are to be taught. Again, who is doing the teaching? Fathers. God “established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel,” and this law is what fathers are commanded to “teach to their children” (Ps 78:6; Ps 34:11).<sup>289</sup>

An entire book of the Bible, Proverbs, presents itself as a father’s instruction to his sons. Neither David nor Solomon appeared to be effective fathers, yet they knew better than they performed. Proverbs is a model of that which fathers are responsible to do for their children.<sup>290</sup> “Hear, my son,” he says,

<sup>288</sup> Poole, *Commentary*, II:257.

<sup>289</sup> See Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:146; Hilderbrand, “Disciplining Children,” 110; Gouge, *Domestic Duties*, 392; Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 187.

<sup>290</sup> See Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 699; Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:107.

*your father's instruction,  
and forsake not your mother's teaching, (Prov 1:8)*

He says again,

*My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you, (Prov 2:1)*

And again,

*My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments,  
<sup>2</sup> for length of days and years of life  
and peace they will add to you. (Prov 3:1, 2)*

And again, and again, and again (Prov 3:21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1; 6:1, 20; 19:27; 23:15-26; 24:13, 21; 27:11) for a total of 17 times in the first 26 chapters. What does the father teach his children? Everything. He begins with “the fear of the Lord” as the foundation of all true “knowledge” (Prov 1:7). For his son to fear the Lord would require knowing who the Lord is, what the Lord requires, and what fear is. He must pursue wisdom and “the knowledge of God” because God is the source of “knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:6).<sup>291</sup>

This godly father throughout Proverbs teaches his son of the importance of his words, of avoiding temptation, of the dangers of alcohol, of the dangers of pride, of care in choosing friends, of care in choosing a wife, of care in handling money, of diligence in work. He teaches him to fear God and obey God and trust God and serve God and commit himself to God. He teaches him of God’s judgment, God’s sovereignty, God’s discipline, and above all, to pursue God’s wisdom.

The Bible doesn’t let mothers off the hook either. King Lemuel, the source of the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of Proverbs, records the wisdom “that his mother taught him.” Lye understands King “Lemuel” to mean “of God,” that is, Solomon, who was chosen “of God” to rule. His mother is Bathsheba.<sup>292</sup> “What are you doing, my son?” she asks twice as she begins her exhortation (Prov 31:1, 2; cf 1:8). So it was that Timothy was taught the Scriptures by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Tim 1:5). Devout parents provide their children with thorough instruction in the paths of godly wisdom. “The good ruler of his family must be a diligent and constant teacher of his household,” says the Puritan George Hamond (1620-1705).<sup>293</sup>

### *Biblical case: New Testament*

---

<sup>291</sup> See Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:107; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 397-99, 401.

<sup>292</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:108. This identification of Solomon with King Lemuel, and Bathsheba with the instructing mother, was typical of the older authors. Poole claims “the general consent of both Jewish and Christian authors.” Likewise the translation of Lemuel “of or from God or belonging to God was understood as a mother’s term of endearment (Poole, *Commentary*, II:276; cf. Trapp, *Commentary*, III: 149, 150; Henry *Commentary*, III:971; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:152, 166; Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 395, 398; more modern authors such as Charles Bridges *Commentary on Proverbs*, disagree ([Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001], 616).

<sup>293</sup> Hamond, *Family Worship*, 29.

As we examine the New Testament, we note that commonly the older writers refer to Jesus' band of disciples as his "family" and note the regularity with which they prayed together (Lk 9:18; 11:1) and Jesus taught them privately (Mk 4:34; Mt 15:15; Mk 13:3, 4). This pattern he intended for us to see as an example, that we might pray with the members of our own family.<sup>294</sup>

The Apostle Paul refers three times to churches that meet in private houses (Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philemon 2; see also Acts 4:23-31 and Acts 12), the second of these providing the text upon which Henry based his sermon. Palmer cites these texts as "giving evidence that the earliest Christian organizations were formed within the enclosure of the Family."<sup>295</sup> The Centurion Cornelius is called "a devout man who feared God with all his household" who "prayed continually" (Acts 10:2, 30). Hamond identifies this as a "plain and pregnant... proof that Cornelius maintained family worship." To fear God "with all house" (*oikos*) "at least necessarily includes his worshipping God in and with his family."<sup>296</sup> Immediately following the Apostle's directions regarding various domestic relations in Colossians 3:18-4:1 (wives, husbands, children, fathers, etc.), he then exhorts,

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* (Col 4:2)

Is he not still addressing families? Families, as families, are to "continue steadfastly in prayer."

Similarly, the Apostle Peter provides directions for wives and husbands concluding with the warning to the latter to live with the former in an "understanding way... so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:1-7). . "Family-disorders hinder family prayer," Doolittle warns. Whose prayers? Their prayers together as husband and wife, which prayers the Apostle assumes are a characteristic family practice.<sup>297</sup>

General duties that are common to Christians may be applied to families. Are Christians not to exhort and instruct one another (Heb 3:13; Rom 15:14)? Are they not to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16)? "How much more, then," Davies asks, "is it our duty to teach, admonish and exhort our families, which are more particularly entrusted to our care?"<sup>298</sup> Are Christians not to pray for each other (Jas 5:16)? Are they not to sing praises to each other (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19)? Are they not to give thanks in everything (1 Thess 5:17, 18; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2)? "Oh, sirs," Davies exclaims, "the case is so plain, you need no time to deliberate."<sup>299</sup> Of course families should pray and sing praises together. It is obvious. "What intelligent Christian can disagree?" Doddridge asks.<sup>300</sup> Davies warns, "If you are determined to resist convictions and live in willful neglect of this duty... your families are like to be nurseries for hell," and, he says, "I must

---

<sup>294</sup> Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 699; Hamond, *Family Worship*, 72-76.

<sup>295</sup> Palmer, *The Family*, 207; see also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 670; Davies, "Family Religion," 19; Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:321.

<sup>296</sup> Hamond, *Family Worship*, 77; see also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 669; Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," 108; Lee, "Conversion," *Puritan Sermons*, 1:157; Whitefield, "Family Religion," 34; Davies, "Family Religion," 19; Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:317.

<sup>297</sup> Doolittle, "Family Prayer," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:238; cf 229, 250.

<sup>298</sup> Davies, "Family Religion," 21.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid*; see also Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:322; Doolittle, "Family Prayer," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:229-230.

<sup>300</sup> Doddridge, "Family Religion," 51.

discharge the artillery of heaven against you.”<sup>301</sup> Finally we turn to the Apostle’s admonition to parents:

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Eph 6:4)

The Apostle Paul uses this term, “instruction” (*narthesia*) elsewhere, in connection with lessons from the Old Testament. “They were written down for our instruction,” he says (1 Cor 10:11). Charles Hodge is happy with the old translation, “admonition,” and defines it as “the act of reminding one of his faults or duties.” They are to be thoroughly instructed, he continues, “so that they be brought to knowledge, self-control, and obedience.”<sup>302</sup> Parents, fathers in particular, are to teach their children the things of God. Our children are to be “instructed *in the Lord*,” meaning provided with instruction “drawn and fetched from the word of the Lord,” says Thomas Lye.<sup>303</sup> They must be nurtured, Lye continues,

not only in arts and sciences, to make them worldly wise and learned; nor only in the mysteries of trading and worldly employment, to make them rich; nor only in matters of morality and civil honesty, to make them sober and virtuous; but in the mysteries of true religion.<sup>304</sup>

We may conclude the divine method of transmitting the faith from one generation to the next is by family-based instruction. “Our great care,” says Henry, “must be to lodge our religion, the great deposit, pure and entire in the hands of those who succeed us.”<sup>305</sup> The family is at the center of God’s kingdom program, Old Testament and New Testament, from Abraham to Moses to David, to the Apostle Paul, to today.

#### *Case from natural revelation and reason*

Not only may we argue on the basis of Scripture, but also on the basis of natural revelation or what we might call sanctified common sense. Families receive the blessings of God, sin against God, and depend on God. Are families not obligated as families to thank God, confess their sins to God, and seek His help and care? Heywood makes the case forcefully:

There are daily cases, occasions, and necessities that require families, to be presented to the Lord. There are family sins to be confessed, wants to be enumerated, mercies to be desired, cares and crosses, to be removed, fears to be prevented, temptations to be resisted, duties to be performed, graces to be exercised, peace to be maintained or regained, passions to be suppressed, mercies to be acknowledged; and all these must be laid at God’s feet in daily prayer. That is a rare family which hath not some prodigal son, or carnal soul, as a member of it; some body sick in it, or some child to dispose of in marriage, or to employ in some occupation; some doubts or difficulties that call for prayer, wherein the

---

<sup>301</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 22, 23.

<sup>302</sup> Hodge, *Ephesians*, 264; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 110, 119; Lee, “Conversion,” *Puritan Sermons*, 1:151; Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:217; Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 39.

<sup>303</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:106.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:106.

<sup>305</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, on Psalm 78:4.

whole family is concerned; or if there be no such exigency at present, yet who knows how soon any of these, or all these may light upon a family? and what remedy is there like family prayer?<sup>306</sup>

Whitefield speaks of “the reasonableness of family religion.” He asks, “Must not your conscience presently tell you it is fit that persons who receive so many mercies together should acknowledge them together?”<sup>307</sup> Since without God’s support and blessing our families would “sink into ruin,” are we not, then, “obliged in a family capacity to acknowledge and praise Him?” Davies asks.<sup>308</sup> At the beginning of the day,

Dare you venture your families out into the world all the day without committing them to the care of Providence in the morning?<sup>309</sup>

At the end of the day,

How can you venture to sleep without committing yourself and yours to the divine protection, and returning thanks for the mercies of the day?<sup>310</sup>

Similarly, Whitefield points out that

there are no families but what have some common blessings of which they have been all partakers to give thanks for; some common crosses and afflictions which they are to pray against; some common sins which they are all to lament and bewail.”

So he asks, “But how this can be done without joining together in one common act of humiliation, supplication, and thanksgiving is difficult to devise.” “Family prayer,” he says, “is a great and necessary duty.”<sup>311</sup>

The writers also utilize practical arguments. Family worship, Whitefield argues, is also “most proper” and effective way of teaching one’s children the Christian faith. He cites the example of the family’s prayers:

They may learn to conceive aright of the divine perfections when they hear you daily acknowledging and adoring them. Their hearts may be touched early with remorse for sin when they hear your confessions poured out before God. They will know what mercies they are to ask for themselves by observing what turn your petitions take. Your intercessions may diffuse into their minds a spirit of love to mankind, a concern for the interest of the church and of their country. . . . Your solemn thanksgivings for the bounties of Providence, and for the benefits of a spiritual nature, may affect their hearts with those impressions towards the gracious Author of all, which may excite in their little breasts love to Him, the most noble and genuine principle of all true and acceptable religion. Thus they

---

<sup>306</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:222-223; cf Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:212-216; 235-236.

<sup>307</sup> Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 52.

<sup>308</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 11.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 38.

may become Christians by insensible degrees, and grow in the knowledge and love of truth as they do in stature.<sup>312</sup>

He speaks of known examples of people who dated their conversions “from the serious and pathetic prayers which they have heard their pious fathers (and) pious mothers presenting before God on their account.”<sup>313</sup> Families committed to the duty of family worship become “nurseries of piety,” he insists.<sup>314</sup> He terms it “the greatest cruelty to your children to neglect” the eternal benefits that come from regular family worship.<sup>315</sup>

Baxter cites the many advantages of family discipline, teaching, and worship, even over the church:

1. You have but a few to teach and rule, and the pastor hath many. 2. They are always with you, and you may speak to them as seasonably and as often as you will, either together, or one by one, and so cannot he. 3. They are tied to you by relation, affection, and covenant, and by their own necessities and interest otherwise than they are to him. Wife and children are more confident of your love to them than of the minister’s; and love doth open the ear to counsel. Children dare not reject your words, because you can correct them, or make their worldly state less comfortable. But the minister doth all by bare exhortation; and if he cast them out of the church for their impenitence, they lose nothing by it in the world; and unless it be in a very hot persecution, families are not so restrained from holy doctrine, worship, and discipline, as churches and ministers often are. Who silenceth you and forbiddeth you to catechize and teach your family? Who forbiddeth you to pray or praise God with them, as well and as often as you can? It is self-condemning hypocrisy in many rulers of families, who now cry out against them as cruel persecutors, who forbid us ministers to preach the gospel, while they neglect to teach their own children and servants, when no man forbiddeth them; so hard is it to see our own sins and duty, in comparison of other men’s.

You have greater and nearer obligations to your family than pastors have to all the people. Your wife is as your own flesh; your children are, as it were, parts of yourself. Nature bindeth you to the dearest affection, and therefore to the greatest duty to them. Who should more care for your children’s souls than their own parents? If you will not provide for them, but famish them, who will feed them? Therefore, as ever you have the bowels of parents, as ever you care what becometh of your children’s souls for ever, devote them to God, teach them his word, educate them in holiness, restrain them from sin, and prepare them for salvation.<sup>316</sup>

---

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 58, 59; see also Alexander, *Family Worship*, 58-70; 82-93.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>316</sup> Baxter, “Poor Man’s Family Book,” *Works*, 4:231; see also Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 110-111; Gouse, *Domestical Duties*, 392-393; Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:110-112; Doddridge, “Religious Education,” 194; Palmer, *The Family*, 282-290.

Henry pleads with us,

I beg of you for God's sake, –for Christ's sake –for your own precious soul's sake, –and for your children's sake of your own bodies, that you will live no longer in the neglect of so great, and necessary, and comfortable a duty as this of family-worship is.<sup>317</sup>

### *Elements of family worship*

There are three basic elements: “As to the parts of family religion,” says Davies, “they are prayer, praise, and instruction.”<sup>318</sup> Doddridge urges us to honor God in our families “by calling them together every day to hear some part of his Word read to them, and to join, for a few minutes at least, in your confessions, prayers, and praises to Him.”<sup>319</sup>

#### 1) *Prayer*

Alexander identifies prayer as “the essential part of Family Worship” and assigns to it “the first place.”<sup>320</sup> According to Swinnock, “Our houses are God's houses, and in God's house there must every day be morning and evening sacrifice.”<sup>321</sup>

Families need direction in the day and protection in the night, and truly either of them is worth a prayer. Thy family sins must be pondered, thy family work must be supplied, and if they do not deserve a prayer they deserve nothing.<sup>322</sup>

Baxter argues that the family as a family both has needs and receives blessings from God. Consequently, “it is the will of God that the family pray for these things when they need them, and give thanks for them when they have received them.”<sup>323</sup> Family prayers focus mainly on family concerns, many of which would be out of place in the public assembly. Baxter explains: “Families have family necessities, which are larger than to be confined to a closet, and yet more private than to be brought still into the assemblies of the church.”<sup>324</sup> Yet “there is no domestic want, danger, sorrow, or dispensation,” says Alexander of family prayers, “which may not be remembered.”<sup>325</sup> Henry identifies five themes for the family's prayers: dependence upon God, confession of sin, thanksgiving for blessings, petitions for mercy and grace, and intercessions for others.<sup>326</sup> “In a word,” he concludes,

---

<sup>317</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, 1:264.

<sup>318</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 8. The “Directory for Family Worship” lists “prayer and praises” and “reading of the scriptures, with catechising in a plain way” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 419).

<sup>319</sup> Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 51; so also Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:467; Newton, “Family Worship,” *Letters*, 90; Alexander, *Family Worship*, 193ff; Hildersham, “Disciplining Children,” 124.

<sup>320</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 195.

<sup>321</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man's Calling,” *Works*, I:338. So also Baxter: “family sins are daily committed, and family mercies daily received, and family necessities daily do occur” (“Directory,” *Works*, 1:421).

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:416.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:419.

<sup>325</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 196.

<sup>326</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, I:254-256.

let us go by this rule in our family devotions, –whatever is the matter of our care, let it be the matter of our prayer; and let us allow no care, which we cannot in faith spread before God: and whatever is the matter of our rejoicing, let it be the matter of our thanksgiving; and let us withhold our hearts from all those joys which do not dispose us for the duty of praise.<sup>327</sup>

Alexander repeats his urging of brevity especially in relation to prayer. ‘Few things are more hardening and deadening in their influence,’ he warns, ‘than the daily recurrence of long and unawakening prayers.’<sup>328</sup> Prayers should be brief and varied, avoiding ‘formalism and tediousness,’ ‘sameness and routine,’ ‘ritual coldness and emptiness.’<sup>329</sup>

For those sensing their inadequacy for leading their families in prayer, Heywood offers 10 practical helps to assist those who when once upon their knees don’t know what to say. We may highlight his recommendations under six categories.

i. Attend a church with a *powerful preaching ministry*. ‘There,’ he says, You will hear directions, motives, precepts, promises, scripture arguments to

quicken and direct you in this practice; there you may gain knowledge of God the object of worship, of Christ the mediator and advocate, of the Holy Ghost that must assist you; there you will get a good understanding of God’s mind and will, which will furnish you with ability, and further your acquaintance with God.’<sup>330</sup> Then pray, he says that ‘the fruit of preaching will appear in your prayers as well as practice.’<sup>331</sup>

ii. *Learn the Scriptures*. We must go to the Bible to learn how to pray. Like the disciples, we must say, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (Lk 11:1). The Scriptures provide us with the language with which to praise God, confess sin, give thanks, and offer our petitions. Sounding a common theme among Reformed Protestants, Heywood exhorts,

If you be mighty in the scriptures, you will be mighty in prayer. God loves to be spoken to in his own language; study scripture precepts, and turn them into prayer, study scripture promises, and turn them into pleas, study scripture threatenings, and turn them into deprecations, and study scripture patterns for imitation.<sup>332</sup>

There also are models of prayer from which we can learn: Abraham (Gen 18:23-33; Jacob (Gen 32:9, 12); Moses (Exo 32:11-13); Joshua (Josh 7:6-9); Hannah (1 Sam 1:11); Solomon (1 Kings 3:6-9; 8:22-53); David (1 Chr 17:16-27); Nehemiah (Neh 1:4-11); Ezra (Ezra 9); Daniel (Dan 9); plus those of the Apostle Paul (Eph 1, Phil 1, Col 1).<sup>333</sup> When reading the Bible, Heywood counsels, ‘Think, now God is speaking to me, and thereby furnishing me with matter to speak to him in prayer.’<sup>334</sup>

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., I:256.

<sup>328</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 197.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 197-199.

<sup>330</sup> Heywood, ‘Family Altar,’ *Works*, IV:378.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 379-380.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.



iii. *Pray an expanded Lord's Prayer.* Elaborate upon each clause. Don't repeat it formally or superstitiously, as though it were a charm. Don't "rattle it over as a parrot," he warns.<sup>335</sup> He provides a model of what he means:

*Our Father who art in heaven:* You are the common Father of all mankind, and our Father in Christ, we humbly and reverently prostrate ourselves at your footstool, in confidence of being received through Your well-beloved Son and our advocate: give us child-like affection for You, with endeared love to all Your people, and tender compassion for all others!

*Hallowed be thy name:* let Your glorious titles, attributes, word and ordinances be manifested through the world, dispose all things to the glory of Your name, assist us in our confessing and forsaking our sins, adoring Your infinite perfections, believing in You, subjecting ourselves to You, attending on You, and aiming at Your glory in all we are, or do, or suffer.

*Thy kingdom come:* destroy, O Lord, the devil's kingdom of ignorance and wickedness, advance Your kingdom in converting sinners, building up Your church, maintaining the power of godliness, and hastening the kingdom of glory, confirming and preparing our souls for our Lord's second coming.

*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:* let Your perceptive will be our rule, enable us to comply with it, give us knowledge of it, conquer the enmity of our stubborn wills, enable us to do Your will singly, sincerely, universally, and constantly, as angels and glorified saints; help us quietly to acquiesce in Your providential will, be it apparently for us or against us.

*Give us this day our daily bread:* vouchsafe to us a competent portion of outward comforts, for our daily supply, and Your blessing therewith, which is the staff of our bread, for we depend on You for all.

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:* for Christ's sake and satisfaction, pardon all our sins; whereby we are indebted to divine justice, which we can never satisfy, but we lay hold by faith on the Lord our righteousness, and freely forgive all men their offences against us, and pray God to forgive them.

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:* Lord, we have depraved hearts, prevent occasions of sin, restrain the tempter, keep us out of harm's way, or make us conquerors of the world, the flesh, and the devil; let not sin have dominion over us.

*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen:* we take not our encouragement in our prayers from any thing in ourselves, but from You who are the only sovereign, all-sufficient God, able and willing to help Your poor creatures; to You only be ascribed all dominion, blessing, honour, glory, and power, for evermore, amen, so be it.<sup>336</sup>

---

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 382-383 (lightly modernized).

iv. *Pray with God alone.* We cannot expect to pray well in public if we fail to pray well in private. “First pray in your closets, and then you will be better able to pray in your families.”<sup>337</sup> In your prayer closet, “you will find that God will suggest words to your minds, which you may employ in your families in prayer.”<sup>338</sup> Skill in public prayer is “obtained by frequent conversing with God as our friend.”<sup>339</sup> He promises “you will never want matter, or words, or enlargedness, if you be thus acquainted with God.” Indeed, “your family will soon perceive that you have been with Jesus in secret, when they discern such freedom of speech and spirit.”<sup>340</sup>

v. *Pray with practical awareness.* Know your sins, needs, mercies, and dangers. Know what the Bible says about the *nature of sin*. This, he says, “will help you in confession, self-accusation, and deep humiliation, which is a considerable part of prayer.”<sup>341</sup> Citing the grief expressed in 2 Chronicles 6:29 and the groaning of Psalm 38:9, he urges,

Sorrow makes eloquent, . . . and if there be inward sighs, there will be outward speeches; if you be full of griefs, you will be full of complaints; if you be full of matter, you will speak that you may be refreshed (Job 32:18-20). Consult the book of conscience, and you will find it easy to draw up a large bill of indictment against your own souls.<sup>342</sup>

*Know your needs.* Know what you and your family lacks. Know your weaknesses. “Need makes beggars,” he says, “and adds earnestness to prayers.”<sup>343</sup> Is a family member unconverted? Is another wavering? Is there a temptation or trial approaching? Is there sickness? Is there a challenge financially? Know your needs and you will plead with earnestness and eloquence.

*Catalogue your mercies.* Recall the kindness of God that you have experienced personally, or as a family, both in temporal and eternal realms, both in material and spiritual things. Given that “they are more than can be told” (Ps 40:5), God’s mercies provide us with abundant matter for praise and thanksgiving.

Know the *dangers* that threaten you. Heywood cites the Latin proverb, “He that knows not how to pray, let him go to sea.” There are dangers on the roadways, dangers in air travel, dangers on the sea, dangers from fires, dangers in the workplace, dangers from storms, dangers from thieves. “Put yourselves into God’s hands every morning and evening, for you are never safe but under his tuition, the omniscient, omnipotent God only can guard you and your family.”<sup>344</sup>

vi. *Beg the help of the Holy Spirit.* Ask the Spirit to enable you to lead the family in its worship and especially to lead in prayer. Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who seek help in prayer (Lk 11:1, 13). The Apostle Paul identifies the role of the Holy Spirit in assisting us with our prayers.

---

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 388.

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom 8:26)*

Note that the Apostle says not that we don't know *how* to pray but for *what* to pray. "We may be at a loss in particulars," Heywood acknowledges, "except the Spirit bring things into our thoughts, and often suggest scripture expressions to our memories."<sup>345</sup> He explains: The Spirit intercedes, by helping His people to intercede. "He prays," says Heywood, "by helping us to pray."<sup>346</sup> The Puritan and Reformed tradition regards with the utmost seriousness the development of the gift of free prayer. Heywood insists that,

They that have any solid experience in the things God, know that the assistance of the Spirit in prayer is the greatest reality in the world; nor was it a temporary gift, but a permanent grace abiding with the church for ever, enabling even private Christians to pray in the Spirit.<sup>347</sup>

2) Not only are prayers to be offered, but the *word is to be read*. "As by prayer thy duty is to acquaint God with thy family wants," says Swinnock, "so by reading some portion of Scripture daily, thy duty is to acquaint thy family with God's will."<sup>348</sup> Typically the older authors recommend a chapter from the New Testament in the morning and a chapter from the Old Testament in the evening. Reading the books of the Bible in order is also recommended, though not exclusively, so as to rule out some discretion. There are times when the diet should be varied: historical narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophets, epistles, gospels, and so on. According to his biographer, Philip Henry (1631-1696), father of Matthew, while recognizing that "one star in the firmament of Scripture differs from another in glory," yet, "whenever God hath a mouth to speak, we should have an ear to hear."<sup>349</sup>

Although the head of house should not be expected to provide an exposition, "It is certainly desirable," says Alexander, "that passing remark should now and then be thrown in, to explain a hard word, present a misconception, to apply a divine sentence to the heart."<sup>350</sup> Care should be taken as to the *manner* of reading the Bible. Alexander is concerned that "half its meaning, and almost all of its effect, are sometimes suffocated and lost, by a sleepy, monotonous, stupid, careless, inarticulate, drawling, or what is worse, an affected delivery."<sup>351</sup> He urges that the best reader in the house should do the reading, "with all solemnity and expression," as "the Scriptures cannot be read too well."<sup>352</sup> Thus the master of the house fulfills two of his offices:

O expecteth that thou shouldst be both a priest to offer up sacrifice for, and a prophet to instruct and teach thy family.<sup>353</sup>

---

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>348</sup> Swinnock, "Christian Man's Calling," *Works*, I:340; see Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 286-287, 394; Henry, *Works*, 1:254.

<sup>349</sup> J. B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, 2 Volumes in one (1698, 1828; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), I:75.

<sup>350</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 209.

<sup>351</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 212.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 212, 213.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.; see Henry, "Church in the House," *Works*, I:254.

Baxter counsels that a chapter be read, plus a few pages from a good book. So it is that “holy families are the seminaries of Christ on earth.”<sup>354</sup>

3) *Singing of psalms*. “I must not omit to recommend to you the singing of psalms in your families, as a part of daily worship,” says Henry.<sup>355</sup> Not only does psalm-singing combine the elements of word and prayer (see Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19), but it also is especially appreciated by the children. Singing, he says, “will warm and quicken you, refresh and comfort you.”<sup>356</sup> Henry published in 1694 *Family Hymns Gathered Mostly out of the Translations of David’s Psalms* for the use of families in their daily devotions.<sup>357</sup>

Alexander complains that singing had ceased to be a part of family worship in many households in his day (writing in 1847). “Domestic psalmody is productive of devotion,” he insists. Indeed, “the singing of God’s praise is eminently conducive to the awakening and maintenance of holy affections.”<sup>358</sup> It also helps prepare children for participation in public worship. Care should be taken that songs be sung from the heart, with understanding and with reverence (1 Cor 14:15).

### *Lively but serious manner*

As we have seen above, all of our authors are concerned that family worship not be conducted with what Heywood calls “mere customary formality.”<sup>359</sup> Those who call upon God must purge their hearts from sin (Ps 66:18), rouse their sleepy souls to take hold of God (Isa 64:7), and cultivate the proper motive of God’s glory rather than impressing others (Mt 6:5, 6). Pray for the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,  
and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!* (Ps 141:2)

See to it that “your heads and hearts be well furnished,” Heywood urges; “your head with sound knowledge, and your hearts with saving grace.” Without these one will not be equipped to lead family worship. “With the former you will have no ability, without the latter, you will have no disposition for the practice,” he warns.<sup>360</sup> Among the necessary ingredients in leading well are “a submissive will, a renewed conscience,” and “sanctified affections.”<sup>361</sup> Without these, Heywood continues, “Your labor will be but lip-labor, and so lost labor; and all your piety will be but hypocrisy.”<sup>362</sup> “Come to prayer with a lively heart and quickened affections yourselves,” Doolittle urges the master of the family.<sup>363</sup> “Take heed of customariness and formalities,” he warns.<sup>364</sup>

---

<sup>354</sup> Baxter, “Poor Man’s Family Book,” *Works*, 4:237, 230; see also Newton, “Family Worship,” *Letters*, 90.

<sup>355</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, I:257.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> Found in *Works*, I:413-443; see also Newton, “Family Worship,” *Letters*, 90.

<sup>358</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 212.

<sup>359</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:368.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, *Works*, IV:368.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:369.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:239.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

### *Frequency, length and tone*

This raises the issue of frequency. Without exception all of the older champions of family worship urge twice daily, morning and evening family worship. They base their argument for morning and evening family worship on the pattern of the temple sacrifices (e.g. Ex 30:7). David prays at the time of the evening sacrifice in Psalm 141:2, and in the morning in Psalm 5 (cf Ps 92:1, 2; see also 2 Tim 1:3).<sup>365</sup> They point to Daniel's thrice daily prayers (Dan 6:10), the call to continuous prayer (Lk 18:1; 1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:1, 2), the godly widow's prayers "night and day" (1 Tim 4:5; cf Acts 2:37), as well as the Apostle's (1 Thess 3:10; 2 Tim 1:3), and other references to morning and evening prayers (Rev 7:15; Neh 1:6; Ps 88:1) and morning and evening Scripture study (Ps 1:2; Josh 1:8), and morning and evening praises (Ps 92:1, 2). Baxter makes the point that,

Morning and evening sacrifices were offered to the Lord; and there is at least equal reason that gospel worship should be as frequent...in gospel times of greater light and holiness, we should not come behind them in times of the law.<sup>366</sup>

Typically the classic authors caution against lengthy devotions. "Be short and serious," Heywood counsels.<sup>367</sup> Alexander admits that "it was the fault of our forefathers to make it insufferably long."<sup>368</sup> This was not the case with Philip Henry, "for he was seldom long, and never tedious in the service," says his biographer. It was his aim "to make it a pleasure and not a task to his children and servants."<sup>369</sup> Often, more is less. Davies suggest a quarter or half an hour morning and evening.<sup>370</sup> Henry counsels, "You need not be long in the service, but you ought to be lively in it."<sup>371</sup> "Warm and lively," says Heywood, like the Lord's Prayer, "expressive and full of earnestness."<sup>372</sup> "Care should be taken," says Newton, "that the combined services (of reading, singing, and praying) do not run into an inconvenient length."<sup>373</sup> One should choose suitable times for family worship. For example, don't leave them for the end of the day. "It will not be so seasonable to go down upon your knees," Heywood warns, "when you are fitter to lie down in your beds."<sup>374</sup> "Late prayers are too commonly sleepy prayers," Doolittle agrees.<sup>375</sup> Most families will find it suitable to schedule family worship in connection with family meals, before family members are too busy or too tired. It is vital that the family be able to "attend upon the Lord without distraction" (1 Cor 7:35). Establish a stated time that the whole family can count on and adjust to, and yet be flexible enough to adapt to unanticipated disruptions.

---

<sup>365</sup> Also Perkins, *Oeconomie*, 670; Davies, "Family Religion," 27; Whitefield, "Family Religion," 38; Hamond, *Family Worship*, 109, 110; Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, I:422; Newton, "Family Worship," *Letters*, 89; Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:314.

<sup>366</sup> Baxter, "Directory," *Works*, I:422.

<sup>367</sup> Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:397.

<sup>368</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 194.

<sup>369</sup> Williams, *Philip and Matthew Henry*, 79; "Be not too short, nor yet too tedious" (Doolittle, "Family Prayer," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:242).

<sup>370</sup> Davies, "Family Religion," 23.

<sup>371</sup> Henry, "Church in the House," *Works*, I:265.

<sup>372</sup> Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:392.

<sup>373</sup> Newton, "Family Worship," *Letters*, 90; see also Lye, "Profitable Catechizing," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:120; Lee, "Means towards Conversion," *Puritan Sermons*, 1:150.

<sup>374</sup> Heywood, "Family Altar," *Works*, IV:396.

<sup>375</sup> Doolittle, "Family Prayer," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:241.

Finally, establish order in the home. “Order your families aright,” Heywood urges. Maintain “due order and government.” Ensure “that every member in your family know and keep in their posts and places.” Good order, a common Puritan theme, will ensure that family members have time for the accomplishment of all their duties, including family worship.

Let every work know its time and every one know his work, that confusion may not shortcut religion: order facilitates any business, prevents impediments, and produceth good success.<sup>376</sup>

### *Excuses*

“There is no truth so plain, no duty so good, but Satan can furnish a witty head and a wicked heart with plausible arguments against it,” Heywood laments.<sup>377</sup> As we’ve seen, Baxter and others insist that a zealous Christian doesn’t need these multiple arguments to convince him of the need of family worship. He doesn’t need to be persuaded “to feast his soul with God, and to delight himself in the frequent exercises of faith and love.” To those who still are not convinced and need further proofs he urges,

Let them know that if they will open their eyes, and recover their appetites, and feel their sins, and observe their daily wants and dangers, and get but a heart that loveth God, these reasons then will seem sufficient to convince them of so sweet, and profitable, and necessary a work.<sup>378</sup>

### *Lack of ability*

They commonly attempt to answer objections to family worship, such as “I have no ability to pray.” Davies won’t hear of it. Don’t know how to pray? “If you had a proper sense of your wants, this plea would not hinder you. Did you ever hear a beggar, however ignorant, make this objection? A sense of his necessities is an unfailing fountain of his eloquence.”<sup>379</sup> For Heywood, “Desire is the soul of prayer.” It is “by praying, men may learn to pray aright.”<sup>380</sup> More importantly, God looks at the heart, not the form of words. “It is not parts, and gifts, and florid expressions that God looks at,” says Doolittle, “but an humble, penitent, broken, and believing heart.”<sup>381</sup>

Similarly, Doddridge maintains,

Where the heart is rightly disposed, it does not require any uncommon abilities to discharge family worship in a decent and edifying manner.<sup>382</sup>

---

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:375.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:328.

<sup>378</sup> Baxter, “Directory,” *Works*, 1:422; Heywood answers 20 objections to family worship! (“Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:328-444)

<sup>379</sup> Davies, “Family Religion,” 27.

<sup>380</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:330.

<sup>381</sup> Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:263.

<sup>382</sup> Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 68; see also Williams, *Philip and Matthew Henry*, 77: “God... cares not how little there is of the head in the duty, so there be a great deal of the *heart*.”

If one is lacking eloquence, Swinnock answers,

A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue... Pray much in secret and thou wilt quickly learn to pray well in private.<sup>383</sup>

Besides, there are helps that may be obtained by providing forms of prayer that might be utilized.

### *Lack of time*

If we object that one lacks time for family worship, Doddridge “cut(s) the objection short at once,” asking “whether you do not have time for many other things, which you know to be of much less importance.” He asks pointedly, “How many hours in a week do you spend for amusement, while you have none for devotion in your family?”<sup>384</sup> Henry is scathing in his rebuke:

You can spare no time at all for it in the morning, nor any in the evening, till you are half asleep. It is thrust into a corner, and almost lost in a crowd of worldly business and carnal converse. When it is done, it is done so slightly, in so much haste, and with so little reverence, that it makes no impression upon yourselves or your families. The Bible lies ready, but you have no time to read... you yourselves can take up with a word or two of prayer, or rest in a lifeless, heartless tale of words. Thus it is every day, and perhaps little better on the Lord’s day, –no repetition, no catechizing, no singing of psalms, or none to any purpose. Is it thus with any of your families? Is this the present state of the church in your house? My brethren, ‘these things ought not’ to be so. It is not enough that you do that which is good, but you must do it well. God and religion have in effect no place in your hearts or houses, if they have not the innermost and the uppermost place. Christ will come no whither to be an underling; he is not a guest to be set behind the door. What comfort, what benefit can you promise to yourselves from such trifling services as these, –from an empty form of godliness without the power of it?<sup>385</sup>

### *Tiresome*

Others may object that family worship is boring. They remember how dull, how tiresome participation in family devotions was in their childhood, and are loathe to repeat the ordeal with their children. J.W. Alexander responds, “Very ignorant, very stupid, or very irreligious people, may transform it into a tedious and burdensome routine.” This is true enough. Yet “this is not fault of the ordinance.” Where there is inspired leadership,

---

<sup>383</sup> Swinnock, “Christian Man’s Calling,” *Works*, I:339.

<sup>384</sup> Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 67.

<sup>385</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, I:265; see also Doolittle, “Family Prayer,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:265-270; Davies, “Family Religion,” 26; Doddridge, “Family Religion,” 67-68; Alexander, *Family Worship*, 54ff; Heywood, “Family Worship,” *Works*, IV:313; 406.

family worship may be made daily “a delightful and animating means of grace,” on which “shines with a pure and hallowed attraction.”<sup>386</sup>

Newton is eager that the duty of family worship not become a formality. That which is conscientiously performed may come to be “mechanically performed,” he warns, “unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive.” The master of the family should be “lively and earnest in performance of the duty,” he urges, “and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behavior at other times.”<sup>387</sup>

Alexander insists that “every part of it should be solemn, and fitted to repress all levity.” Care should be taken that “every secular task or amusement be suspended and absolute silence and quiet be enforced.” He commends simplicity in speech yet also “a holy animation, as that which will arrest attention, and make way for pleasant memories.”<sup>388</sup>

## Catechizing

A sketch of the history of catechetical instruction may be found in the present author’s *Catechizing Our Children*.<sup>389</sup> Luke wrote to Theophilus, regarding the things he had been “taught” (*katēcheō*), from which we get our word “catechize” (Lk 1:4). The Apostle refers to the one who is “taught” sharing all good things with the one who “teaches,” or the one who is *catechized* sharing with the one who *catechizes* (both are forms of the verb *katēcheō*) (Gal 6:6; cf Rom 2:18; Acts 18:25; 1 Cor 14:19). He also speaks of “a form of teaching” (Rom 6:17) and “a form of sound words” (2 Tim 1:13). The question and answer format goes back to Socrates (d. 399 BC) and the ancient Greeks. It was adapted by the early Christians, such as Cyprian (199-258) and Origen (c. 184-c.253), and examples of which include Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures* (c. 350) Clement of Alexandria’s *Pedagogus* (c. 198), Lactantius’ *Institutes* (c. 303-311), Athanasius *Synopsis*, Augustine’s *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed* (c. 400), and *Enchiridion*. The question and answer format goes back to Socrates (d. 399 BC) and the ancient Greeks. It was adapted by the early Christians, examples of which include Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures* (c. 350) and Augustine’s *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed* (c. 400). Catechizing flourished in the patristic era, waned in the Middle Ages, and was revived by the Reformers, beginning with Luther as early as 1516-17. His *Small Catechism* (1529) was among his most successful publications, doing much to popularize Protestant doctrine. A number of Reformers followed suit, the most important being Calvin’s *Genevan Catechism*, first published in 1537 and revised in 1542 and again in 1545, followed by the *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, the standard for the Dutch and German Reformed churches.

In the English speaking world, Thomas Cranmer provided a catechism in the first *Book of Common Prayer* (1549). However, by far the most important catechism in the English-speaking world has been the Westminster Assembly’s *Shorter Catechism*, first published in 1648.

---

<sup>386</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 248-249.

<sup>387</sup> Newton, “Family Worship,” *Letters*, 90.

<sup>388</sup> Alexander, *Family Worship*, 194-195.

<sup>389</sup> T. L. Johnson, *Catechizing Our Children* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 7-15.



Parents who wish to lead their children to sincere commitment to Christ should not neglect this tool of catechizing. Thomas Manton (1620-1677) speaks of recommending “with the greatest earnestness the work of catechizing.”<sup>390</sup> According to Whitefield, citing Genesis 18:17, Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, and Ephesians 6:1, 2, “scarcely any thing is more frequently pressed upon us in the holy writ than this duty of catechizing.”<sup>391</sup> Reformed luminaries from Calvin to the Westminster Assembly, to Richard Baxter (1615-1691) to John Owen (1616-1683) to Thomas Watson (1620-1686) to John Flavel (1627-1691) to Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) to George Whitefield (1714-1770) to Charles Hodge (1797-1878) to B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) to John Murray (1898-1975) enthusiastically endorsed the catechizing of children. Many of the Puritans wrote their own catechisms or supplemented the *Shorter Catechism*. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), who in so many ways represents the apex of Reformed pastoral theology, not only provides the best treatment of family worship, but also the best treatment of catechizing with his “Sermon Concerning the Catechizing of Youth.”<sup>392</sup> The sermon is an exposition of 2 Timothy 1:13.

*Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 1:13)*

He argues that the “form” (NASB, KJV) or “pattern of sound words” of which the Apostle Paul speaks are the doctrines which comprise “the main principles of Christianity.” However, these principles “lie scattered in the Scripture” and must be “collected and brought together” if we are rightly to understand them and believe them. This is what our catechisms and confessions do. They “pick up from the various parts of holy writ those passages which... contain the essentials of religion, the foundations and main pillars upon which Christianity is built.” These “truths of God” are then “arranged and put in order” so that one might easily see “how one thing tends to another, and all centre in Christ, and the glory of God in Christ.” The whole, then, is “brought down to the capacity of young ones.”<sup>393</sup> It is a time-tested method of passing on one’s faith to one’s children. “It is,” Henry insists, “a very great advantage to young people, to hear and learn the Christian forms of sound words in the days of their youth; to have been well taught some good catechism, or confession of faith.”<sup>394</sup> He urges, “Let families be well catechized, and then the public preaching of the word will be the more profitable, and the more successful.”<sup>395</sup>

Baxter provides 25 directions for families in their catechetical instruction.

### ***Begin early***

Begin the work of memorization early. “Cause your younger children to learn the words, though they be not yet capable of understanding the matter,” Baxter advises.<sup>396</sup> Don’t make the mistake

---

<sup>390</sup> Manton, “Epistle,” 8.

<sup>391</sup> Whitefield, “Family Religion,” 39; see also Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 287, 394-395; Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:101; 105-108; 112, 115.

<sup>392</sup> Henry, “Sermon Concerning the Catechizing of Youth,” *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry: Treatises, Sermons, and Tracks*, Volumes I-II (1855; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), II:157-173.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, II:160-161.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, II:158.

<sup>395</sup> Henry, “Church in the House,” *Works*, I:262.

<sup>396</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works*, 1:479.

of thinking that one makes hypocrites of one's children if one teaches them the words of Scripture or the catechism before they have understanding. Instead he points out the advantages that comes later:

when they come to years of understanding, that part of their work is done, and they have nothing to do but to study the meaning and use of those words which they have learned already.<sup>397</sup>

Lye points out that all learning progresses from parroting to understanding. Children are taught to memorize their a-b-c's, vowels, numbers, vocabulary, and even names and dates before they come to comprehend their meaning. Understanding grows with time. Begin "as soon as ever their understandings begin to bud and blossom," Lye advises.<sup>398</sup> In addition, there are advantages to beginning early before their minds have been poisoned by error. "It is best growing a fair picture on a *rasa tabula*," says Lye. "Little ones have not as yet imbibed such false principles and notions, nor are they drenched with such evil habits, as elder ones are too, too frequently dyed with."<sup>399</sup> One may teach them directly without having first to root up error.

### ***Pre-catechism***

1. Begin by explaining rudimentary truths: that there is a God who has made them and all things, that is to be honored and worshipped, that life is brief and uncertain, that judgment awaits in eternity.
2. Utilize simple illustrations and metaphors. Witnessing a beautiful sunrise or sunset, a beautiful landscape or seascape? Speak of God's creative skill. Eating an especially delicious orange or strawberry, apple or pineapple? Speak of God's goodness. Enduring a powerful storm, lightning, thunder, howling winds, powerful tides? Speak of God's power. Dressing your child? Speak of being clothed with Christ's righteousness. Walking into your house? Speak of that house made without hands that we one day will have in heaven (2 Cor 5:1). Standing by a riverside? Speak of the living waters that are ours in Christ (Jn 4). "Teach those little bees to suck spiritual honey out of every flower," says Lye.<sup>400</sup>
3. Teach them the most memorable of Bible stories: the fall, Noah and the ark, Lot and Sodom, Joseph, the exodus, the golden calf, Gideon, Samson, David and Goliath, Daniel and the lion's den, the three children in the fiery furnace, Jonah and the fish, and so on.
4. Introduce them to the basic elements of worship through family worship: prayer, singing praises, and reading Scripture.
5. Restrain them from every form of evil and breed in them a tender conscience regarding every form of sin.

---

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> See Lye, "Profitable Catechizing," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:113.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 117; so also Gouge, *Domestical Duties*, 398.

<sup>400</sup> Lye, "Profitable Catechizing," *Puritan Sermons*, 2:118.

6. Bring them to public services “as soon as they can come to be there, without the disturbance of the church,” advises Lye.<sup>401</sup> The assembly of Israel regularly included the “little ones” (Deut 29:11; Josh 8:35; Isa 2:5; Joel 2:16; Jon 3:5). Jesus welcomed the little children and blessed them (Mt 19:13-15; Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15).
7. Include what the older sources called “godly conferences” in which the children’s understanding is explored (cf Mt 13:5; Mk 4:34).

### *Catechisms*

1. Have them memorize and learn the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments or summaries of what we must believe, what we must desire and seek, and what we must practice. These three forms have been a part of catechetical instruction at least since Augustine.
2. Have them memorize and learn a short catechism, and then later the larger catechism. Baxter reckons that “the shorter and larger catechisms of the (Westminster) Assembly are very well fitted to this use.”<sup>402</sup> Lye commend their “peculiar excellency” in that “every answer in them is an entire proposition itself, without relation to the question preceding.”<sup>403</sup>
3. Read to them good expositions of the catechisms (which cover the creed, commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer). Baxter identifies 17 specific topics. Thomas Watson’s *A Body of Divinity* (which originally included what are now separate volumes on the *Ten Commandments* and the *Lord’s Prayer*) is the kind of book Baxter is recommending.<sup>404</sup>
4. In all family instruction, be sure to “let it be always with such a mixture of familiarity and seriousness that may carry along their serious attentions, whether they will or no. Speak to them as if they or you were dying, and as if you saw God, and heaven, and hell.”<sup>405</sup>
5. Have them learn pertinent texts for each great and necessary duty and danger.
6. Teach them how to pray.
7. Give them edifying books to read.

---

<sup>401</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:118.

<sup>402</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works*, 1:479; also Manton quotes Baxter in his preface to the Westminster Standards: “First, let them read and learn the Shorter Catechism, and next the Larger, and lastly, read the Confession of Faith” (“Mr. Manton’s Epistle to the Reader” in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 12); Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:121.

<sup>403</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:121.

<sup>404</sup> See also Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:123. He commends expositions of the Shorter Catechism by Alleyn, Vincent, and Doolittle.

<sup>405</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works*, 1:

8. Explain this *baptism* and the *covenant* of grace.<sup>406</sup> In other words, explain the whole plan of salvation, from the problem of the human condition to the covenant of salvation in Christ. Explain, says Baxter,

that he that consenteth unfeignedly to this covenant, is a member of Christ, a justified, reconciled child of God, and an heir of heaven, and so continuing, shall be saved; and he that doth not shall be damned. This is the covenant, that in baptism we solemnly entered into with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as our Father and Felicity, our Saviour, and our Sanctifier.<sup>407</sup>

### *Aids*

1. Baxter urges direct, personal questions and application with one's children. In addition to catechizing:

Take each of them sometimes by themselves, and there describe to them the work of renovation, and ask them, whether ever such a work was wrought upon them. Show them the true marks of grace, and help them to try themselves; urge them to tell you truly, whether their love to God or the creature, to heaven or earth, to holiness or flesh-pleasing, be more; and what is that hath their hearts, and care, and chief endeavor: and if you find them regenerate, help to strengthen them; if you find them too much dejected, help to comfort them; and if you find them unregenerate, help to convince them, and then to humble them, and then to show them the remedy in Christ, and then show them their duty that they may have part in Christ, and drive all home to the end that you desire to see; but do all this with love, and gentleness, and privacy.

Then ask,

Some pertinent questions which by the answer will engage them to teach themselves, or to judge themselves, will be sometimes of very great use. As such as these; "Do you not know that you must shortly die? Do you not believe that immediately you souls must enter upon an endless life of joy or misery? Will worldly wealth and honours, or fleshly pleasures, be pleasant to you then? Had you then rather be a saint, or an ungodly sinner? Had you not then rather be one of the holiest that the world despised and abused, than one of the greatest and richest of the wicked? When time is past, and you must give account of it, had you not then rather it had been spent in holiness, and obedience, and diligent preparation for the life to come, than in pride, and pleasure, and pampering the flesh? How could you make shift to forget your endless life so long? or to sleep quietly in an unregenerate state? What if you had died before conversion, what think

---

<sup>406</sup> Gouge urges that one utilize the public ordinances such as baptism and the Lord's Supper as teaching tools (*Domestical Duties*, 395).

<sup>407</sup> Baxter, "Christian Directory," *Works*, I:482.

you had become of you, and where had you now been? Do you think that any of those in hell are glad that they were ungodly? Or have now any pleasure in their former merriments and sin? What think you would they do, if it were all to do again? ... such kind of questions urge the conscience, and much convince.<sup>408</sup>

2. Baxter cautions not to attempt to do too much:

Tire them not out with too much at once; but give it them as they can receive it. Narrow-mouthed bottles must not be filled as wider vessels.<sup>409</sup> Babies must be fed with a spoon. Plants can be ruined by too much watering. The little ones must be driven gently (Gen 33:13). “Avoid all tedious prolixity,” Lye urges.<sup>410</sup>

3. Lye urges parents not to become discouraged by the resistance to catechizing they encounter from their children. Their “averseness... is not the least argument of its singular usefulness,” he argues counterintuitively.<sup>411</sup> As with the case with painful medical procedures, the patient may complain, or resist, yet his discomfort is no argument against the treatment. So it is with catechizing.

4. Parents should not be discouraged by a lack of tangible success from their labors. Lye cites a timeless principle: we are called to be faithful, not successful. “God takes the measure of his servants, not from their success, which is *his soul work*; but from their sedulous and faithful endeavors, which is *their duty*.”<sup>412</sup>

5. Baxter urges a positive teaching environment.

Labour to make all sweet and pleasant to them... entice them with kindnesses and rewards. Be kind to your children when they do well... A small gift now and then, might signify much to the further benefit of their souls.<sup>413</sup>

“Labour in to insinuate yourselves into their affections,” says Lye.<sup>414</sup>

6. Finally, if any say this is too much, Baxter counters,

I entreat them to consult with Christ that died for them, whether souls be not precious, and worth all this ado? And to consider how small a labour all this is, in comparison of the everlasting end; and to remember, that all is gain and pleasure, and a delight to those that have holy hearts; and to remember, that the effects to the church and kingdom, of such holy government of families, would quite over-compensate all the pains.<sup>415</sup>

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 1:482.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:120.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 2:124.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Baxter, “Christian Directory,” *Works*, 1:482.

<sup>414</sup> Lye, “Profitable Catechizing,” *Puritan Sermons*, 2:125.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

“Happy is the family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained,” says Newton.<sup>416</sup> Let us then maintain, as Heywood urges, this “most indisputable duty.”<sup>417</sup>

---

<sup>416</sup> Newton, “Family Worship,” *Letters*, 92.

<sup>417</sup> Heywood, “Family Altar,” *Works*, IV:363.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, J. W. *Thoughts on Family Worship*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990.
- Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. 1950; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978.
- Baxter, Richard. "A Christian Directory," *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Volumes 1-4. 1654-5, 1673; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Publications, 19<sup>th</sup> century reprint, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Poor Man's Family Book," *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Volumes 1-4. 1654-5, 1673; Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Publications, 19<sup>th</sup> century reprint, 1990.
- Calvin, John. *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, translator John W. Fraser, Calvin's Commentaries 1546, 1547. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960.
- Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1988.
- Davies, Horton. *The Worship of the English Puritans*. 1948; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997.
- Davies, Samuel. "The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion," in Don Kistler (ed.). *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children*. Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1973.
- Doddridge, Philip. "A Plain and Serious Address on the Important Subject of Family Religion," in *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays and Duties of Parents and Children*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Four Sermons on the Religious Education of Children," in *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays and Duties of Parents and Children*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993.
- Doolittle, Thomas. "How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family," *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689*. 1844; Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1. 1834; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.
- Flavel, John. *The Mystery of Providence*. 1678; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976.
- Gouge, William. *Of Domestical Duties*. 1622; Pensacola, FL: Puritan Reprints, 2006.

- Gurnall, William. *The Christian in Complete Armour*. 1662 and 1665; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964.
- Hamond, George. *The Case for Family Worship*. 1694; Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005.
- Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Philadelphia: Tarvar & Hogan, 1828.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Church in the House," *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family*. 1704; Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Church in the House," *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry: Treatises, Sermons, and Tracts*, Volumes I-II. 1855; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sermon Concerning the Catechizing of Youth," *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry: Treatises, Sermons, and Tracts*, Volumes I-II. 1855; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Heywood, Oliver. "The Family Altar," in *The Works of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*, Volumes 1-5. 1825; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1999.
- Hildersham, Arthur. "Disciplining Children," in *The Godly Family: A Series of Essays and Duties of Parents and Children*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992.
- Johnson, T. L. *Catechizing our Children*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Case for Traditional Protestantism*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Family Worship Book*. 1998; Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003.
- Kagan, Donald; Ozment, Steven; Turner, Frank M. *The Western Heritage*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.
- "Little Churches: Ritual in the Home," *The Journal of the Liturgical Conference: Liturgy*, Volume 21, Nov. 4, 2006.
- Lee, Samuel. "What Means May Be Used towards the concession of Our Carnal Relations," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689*. 1844; Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981.
- Lye, Thomas. "By What Scriptural Rules May Catechizing Be So Managed as That It May Become Most Universally Accepted," in *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689*. 1844; Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981.
- Manton, Thomas. "Mr. Thomas Manton's Epistle to the Reader," *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Inverness, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1983.



- M'Cheyne, Robert Murray. "Family Government," *Additional Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne*. Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1984.
- McKee, Elsie Anne (ed.). *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England*. New York: Harper&Row, 1966.
- Newton, John. "Family Worship," *The Letters of John Newton*. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965.
- Old, Hughes O. "Matthew Henry and the Puritan Discipline of Family Prayer," in John Leith (ed.), *Calvin Studies*, VII, "Papers Presented at a Colloquium on Calvin Studies," Davidson College, Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Davidson, NC, Jan. 28-29, 1994.
- Ozment, Steven. *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990.
- Palmer, Benjamin M. *The Family in its Civil and Churchly Aspects*. 1876; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1981.
- Perkins, William, *Oeconomic, or Household Government: A Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family, according to the Scriptures*. 1609; London: John Haviland, 1631.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Household Government," forthcoming in Volume 10 of his reprinted *Works*.
- Poole, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Volumes I-III. 1683-85, 1865; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962.
- Ryle, J. C. *Duties of Parents*. Sand Springs, OH: Grace and Truth Books, 2002.c
- Ryken, Leland. *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Safley, Thomas Max. "Family," in Hilderbrand, Hans J. (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Volumes 1-4. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. 1867, 1910; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1994 reproduction of fifth edition, revised.
- Stark, Rodney. *How the West Was Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014.
- Swinnock, George. "A Christian Man's Calling," *The Works of George Swinnock*, Volume I. 1808; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992.
- Trapp, John. *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, Volumes I-V. 1647, 1865-68; Eureka, CA: Tansky Publications, 1997.
- Westminster Confession of Faith*. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994.
- Whitefield, George. "The Great Duty of Family Religion," in Kistler (ed.), *The Godly Family*. Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993.
- Williams, J. B. *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, 2 Volumes in one. 1698, 1828; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.