

## The Home: Heartbeat of the Covenant

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (III John 4). This verse certainly states the goal of all instruction and covenant rearing. To find young people who love the truth, confess it with their mouth publicly in the church, and give evidence of it in a godly walk of life in the midst of the world is a source of great joy not only to parents but also to pastors, teachers, and older members of the church. We know that this is possible only by the electing grace of God and the fruit of the Spirit in the hearts of covenant children. But we also understand, and Scripture is clear on this, that God uses means, weak and foolish in the eyes of men, to work faith and godliness in the hearts and lives of His own. The demands of the covenant obligate Christian parents to instruct and bring up the children God has placed in their care. This training is a full time, all encompassing, serious obligation (Deut. 6:6-9, Eph. 6:4). Members of the church cannot expect to experience the joy in III John 4 mentioned above if they do not carry out their God-given calling to train their children in the fear of the Lord.

Wherever one turns in the Scripture to passages that deal specifically with instruction of children, one finds that the responsibility falls first of all squarely on the shoulders of parents, and especially fathers. The home is the heartbeat of the covenant of grace and the promise of God to continue His covenant in our generations. It is covenant parents who bring their children to church to receive the spiritual food and drink they know their children need. It is parents who send their children to the Christian school to be instructed in all aspects of God's creation in the light of Holy Scripture. There is no institution that can take the place of the home, and there is no influence as effective and telling as the influence of the home.

There is a real danger here for us as parents. The danger is that we begin to think that we fulfil our responsibility in covenant rearing simply by seeing to it that our children go to church to hear the truth of the Word preached, and send our children to the Christian school to have them taught under God-fearing school teachers. We are quite willing to feed and clothe our children and care for their bodily wants and needs but leave their spiritual needs to proper church and school instruction. Sadly mistaken is this notion, but I fear that it is many times alive with us today.



The school is the extension of the home. It cannot and must not attempt to replace the home. Teachers in the school in a very real way instruct products of the home and church. Let me say a few things about these "products" in their very early years. Most of the child's values and attitudes are developed before the child attends a day of kindergarten. These will be developed by the training of us parents by example (good or bad), the spiritual climate of our home (godly or ungodly), and by direct spiritual instruction (or lack of it). The emphasis today is on earlier instruction in numbers and letters. The pre-school boom is alive in our society. As a teacher I am concerned that children are intellectually ready for school; but as a Christian school teacher I wish for a child who has from his earliest years been taught sound spiritual values and has developed a godly attitude. Really only when this foundation is set is the child

ready to attend the Christian school and will that intellectual training be beneficial in his development. Remember that Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning not only of wisdom but also of knowledge.



Let me cite a couple specific values that are so crucial in these early years and need development throughout childhood. First and foremost is the teaching of reverence and respect for God and sacred things. The child must see that by our example in the home. The things of God and His kingdom causes must be first in our life. Are they in your home? We need to hear this also in the preaching in church. Not long ago our pastor preached on the reverence of God, from Isaiah 28:9-10. This teaching is given according to the child's development, "those drawn from the breasts," and given repetitively, "line upon line, here a little and there a little." You see, when a child comes to school with reverence for God, then he respects those God has placed in authority over him, his teachers. He can understand and respect authority in government and the state (civics). He will respect the creation of that God (science) and his relation and calling toward the earth (geography). He will be interested in the carrying out of the counsel of that God (history and Bible) and he will appreciate God's creative order of all things (math and language). In a word, that child who is taught respect, reverence, and the fear of God is ready for school.

A second attitude and value is love—love for God, of course, but also now love for one another. I Corinthians 13

clearly teaches the importance of this spiritual gift. All other learning and gifts are nothing without this one. We as parents surely must teach it by our example in the home. We must teach our children God's great love for us, and we must show from examples in the Bible what true love is. We then demand that our children live in love toward one another. In a school setting, surely, one can see the benefits and effects of children who have been taught this. They respect one another's persons and bear one another's burdens. They learn to let others be first, and they don't mock or laugh at one another. We as teachers must demand this loving behavior of our students and so help covenant homes rear their children. The teachers who stand in your place had better be loving examples here. Once again, a child who has been taught his calling to love is ready for school.

In an interesting book entitled *Baptism and Christian Education*, Samuel Miller writes the following about developing godliness in early youth:

*"On the one hand, when the early youth of children is passed without proper instruction in divine things, it is difficult to measure or conceive the thick darkness which generally covers their minds, . . . When men grow old in ignorance as well as in sin, they are surrounded with a double barrier against the entrance of heavenly light. On the other hand, when seed of truth and duty are early and faithfully sown in the minds of youth, though they may long lie buried, there is a strong ground of hope that they will eventually spring up and bring forth a rich harvest. Who can estimate, then, the cruelty, the awful guilt, of those (whether parents or pastors) who neglect that which is so closely connected not only with present happiness, but with the everlasting welfare of every youth committed to their care?" (pg. 143-144)*

You see, the school as well as the home and church must be concerned not only about the present life of the child but also about his everlasting welfare. Please, parents, don't let the church and school be more concerned about this than you are.

One of the strengths I see in the covenant youth whom I have taught is that they know the truth. They have no doubts about the doctrine of creation or of sovereign predestination. They know that Arminianism is wrong and that common grace is the lie. I know that this strength can be attributed to the sound preaching of the Word of God in our churches and the systematic catechetical instruction our children receive. The home, too, is active here in teaching the children the catechism and reinforcing these truths.

As great as this strength of knowing the truth and being able to identify the lie is (in worldly textbooks, for example) there is something lacking here. What is lacking is the ability to be able to turn to the Bible and prove the truth and expose the lie. I know that all of us struggle here, but I think that if we would use more repetition and specific application of passages, we would be better equipped also to be a witness to those who ask us concerning our faith. We must be able to "prove all things, hold(ing) fast to that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21).

A second weakness in this area is the lack of vitality with which our children are willing to discuss the truth. I hear ministers and Young People's Society leaders complain that creating discussion is like pulling teeth. The same is true in school many times. Discussion on George Washington's battle



strategies or some literary character's actions can bring hands galore, but analyzing things in the light of the Bible seems to close minds. Why? Is it because we're not talking about spiritual things when we are sitting, walking, lying, and rising in our homes (Deut. 6:7)? We need to speak and discuss openly with our children the light of the Word in all areas of life. I think this is an area in which the school can greatly build on foundations laid in the home and church.

In a book entitled *A Christian Pedagogy*, written by Edward W.A. Koehler, the author writes this:

*"Whoever wishes to raise a crop of vegetables must not only keep his garden free from weeds, but must also sow good seed and water it and nurse the tiny plants till they grow strong and ripen unto the harvest. It is even so in the training of children." (page 223)*

The point that Koehler is warning against is one-sided instruction. This instruction is characterized by the word "NO" and the phrase "thou shalt not" as if the negative will in itself reap positive fruit. But active service to God is fostered by putting on the new man and not only by curbing the old man of sin (Eph. 4:22-24, Col. 3:12-14). When asked in school to list specific sins that are evident of the old man, students can fill pages. Asked to do the same with the desired fruits of the new man, students struggle to list any at all. One wonders why. I don't mean to minimize knowledge of sin, but education must be constructive. The good seeds must be watered and the tiny plants nursed. The goal is the man of God who is thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Children must learn to avoid evil, but they also and primarily must be taught to do the good. Our discipline of them must reflect that too. It has the positive goal of godliness in the child's life. We must remember that the Scriptures are profitable not only for correction but also for instruction in righteousness (I Tim. 3:15-17).

An important aspect of Scripture's instruction in righteousness is the teaching that each child of God is part of a large body which is the church of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 12). How much of our correction in the home and school results from a neglect of this truth? I fear that we often begin to glorify the American ideal of rugged individualism. We can easily do this by acquiring the things of this world that we want and desire, and never show expressions of love and kindness to those who have needs (physical and spiritual). When children see father and mother and family living in luxury,



and the church and Kingdom causes begging for support, they are being taught a value of which we ought to be ashamed. It should not be surprising then that our children grow up to be selfish and self-centered.

These things amount to practical Christianity. To *know* the truth is not enough. One is called to *live* the truth. Christian instruction must build positive values, cultivate Christian virtues and godly habits, as well as mold Christian character. It must be a striving for the command of God in I Peter 1:16 where we read "Be ye holy; for I am holy." We as parents and teachers need to be more like the pious Waldenses, whom historians tell us were in the habit of using every hour they could rescue from labor and sleep in gaining religious knowledge themselves and imparting it to their children.

I guess I have found it easier to see weaknesses than strengths. I think that is because I know my own weaknesses as a parent and teacher and can see so much room for spiritual growth and improvement.

May we as pastors, teachers, and parents be diligent in bringing the children to Christ through His Word. And in this way may God give us the blessed joy of seeing our children (young people) walking in truth.

*This article was written by Mr Ron Koole and appeared in The Standard Bearer Volume 65, Issue 20*

*Mr. Koole was the administrator/teacher in the Loveland Prot. Ref. School in Colorado, and the father of six young children when he wrote this article in 1989.*

**Some of the 'purchases' we were able to make with our Woollies Earn and Learn points.**

