

## The Christian Home (19): Parental Duties (part 2)

Having considered the matter and manner of parental instruction, we come this morning to its means (leaving its motives for next week).

### I. The Means of Instruction

1. *Formal instruction.* By this is meant formal or planned weekly and/or daily instruction. (1) Family worship. This typically consists of Bible reading, catechizing, singing, and praying. This should take place regularly (ideally daily), at a time that is most practical (i.e., after supper or before bedtime), and ordinarily led by the father. "Family worship should include reading of Scripture and prayer, and may also include singing of praise, catechizing, and discussion appropriate to the age and understanding of those present. Ordinarily, the head of the home should assume leadership responsibility for family worship, and participation by all present should be encouraged."<sup>1</sup> "God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself" (2LBC).<sup>2</sup> "But as for me and my house, we will serve (worship) the LORD" (Josh.24:15).

(a) Bible reading. A portion of the Bible should read and explained. Basic questions should be asked of the younger children, and open discussion encouraged of the older children. In his booklet, *Rediscovering the Lost Treasure of Family Worship*, Jerry Marcellino suggested five ways "God's Word can be conveyed to your family." "First, by direct reading from the Bible according to a plan. Second, by reading from a sound Bible story book. Third, through Scripture memory and review. Fourth, by reading from a good devotional commentary. Fifth, by reading through solid Christian classics like *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Make sure your Bibles are in front of you, to explore the scriptural truths that will jump from every page)."<sup>3</sup>

(b) Catechizing. The Children's Catechism and The Shorter Catechism were written for family worship. Depending on the age and/or compacity of the child, ordinarily a question can be memorized each week. "Creeds and catechisms are other valuable tools or methods by which we may communicate the truths of the Word of God to our children. These documents provide clear, concise definitions of basic doctrines and key words in easily memorized form so our children can hide them in their hearts Bible references ('proof texts') anchor these definitions in Scripture" (Beeke).<sup>4</sup>

(c) Singing. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous" (Ps.118:15). Shorter and simpler hymns (Psalms) should be sung and memorized. "Get hymnals for everyone. Some people sing a different song each time; some sing the same song for a week so they can learn it" (Whitney).<sup>5</sup> "I agree with Matthew Henry when he says, 'They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the Scriptures do better; but they that pray, and read, and sing do best of all.' There is a completeness in that kind of family worship which is much to be desired" (Spurgeon).<sup>6</sup>

(d) Praying. "Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, and on the families who do not call on Your name" (Jer.10:25). "Whether prayer is offered by the father only, or by the entire family, be sure to pray together" (Whitney).<sup>7</sup> "It is important that our children learn to pray aloud. If children pray aloud in the company of other family members at early ages, they are less likely to feel

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<sup>1</sup> *The Directory of Public Worship for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, 3:5

<sup>2</sup> 2LBC, 22:6

<sup>3</sup> Jerry Marcellino, *Rediscovering the Lost Treasure of Family Worship*, 12

<sup>4</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 82

<sup>5</sup> Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 38-39

<sup>6</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 32:289

<sup>7</sup> Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 38

awkward doing so when they grow older. Praying in front of parents will be natural and unforced if parents start the practice when children are very young" (Beeke).<sup>8</sup>

Donald Whitney, in his booklet entitled, *Family Worship*, provided three reminders of family worship.<sup>9</sup> First, brevity. "Be brief. Otherwise, the experience can become tedious. It is always easy to lengthen the time if the occasion seems to be especially meaningful." Second, regularity. "Try to have a regular time each day for family worship. For some people it works best early in the morning before the family scatters. For others, the most convenient time is at the close of the evening meal. A third popular time for family worship is late in the evening or at bedtime." Third, flexibility. "Every family has to flex its worship time sometimes. Just make sure that your flexibility does not lead to inconsistency. Nevertheless, if developing an entirely new family routine is what it takes to begin family worship, the benefits will be worth whatever it costs."

(2) Personal devotions. By this is meant, the encouragement of children to read, pray, sing, and memorize Scripture in private.

(3) Sabbath day activities. Fathers are responsible to ensure the inhabitants of their house keep the Sabbath day holy. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, or your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates" (Ex.20:8-10). To keep the Lord's Day holy means to treat it differently than the others. Only on this day, are we able to gather as a people and worship God according to His word.

Do not allow your children to grow up with a habit of making vain excuses for not coming. Give them plainly to understand, that so long as they are under your roof it is the rule of your house for every one in health to honor the Lord's house upon the Lord's Day, and that you reckon the Sabbath-breaker to be a murderer of his own soul.<sup>10</sup>

Parents must ensure their children are learning from the public instruction. "You who are parents must examine your children as to how they profit by the means of grace. You must test them as to how they understand what they hear. Repeat it and make it ore plain to them, and, in repeating it, apply it also" (Hildersham).<sup>11</sup> "Confer with them familiarly about the things that have been handled in the ministry of the Word. Go over one thing after another with them till you see that they have gotten clear ideas of them" (Mather).<sup>12</sup>

When you return to your home after the worship service, talk about what took place. Discuss the sermon with them. Don't just talk about the preacher, or the stories he told. Talk about the content, and especially the application of the sermon. Ask them questions. The puritans called with *improving* on what was done in worship, to the mutual benefit of all those in their families.<sup>13</sup>

Edward Harman, in his book *Homeward Bound*, has a chapter entitled, *The Centrality of the Lord's Day in the Godly Home*. In it he provides 10 ways we can "celebrate and enjoy this day to our greatest

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<sup>8</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 84

<sup>9</sup> Donald Whitney, *Family Worship*, 41-42

<sup>10</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room*, 296

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Hildersham, *Dealing with Sin in our Children*, 19

<sup>12</sup> Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 11

<sup>13</sup> Edward Hartman, *Homeward Bound*, 130

benefit."<sup>14</sup> First, "recognize that the Law of the Lord's Day is presented to us in the context of grace." The day was given to us for our blessing and benefit. Second, "we must prepare ahead of time." Gas the car, prepare food, and get to sleep at a reasonable time. Third, "begin each Lord's Day by reading your Bible and praying with your family before your leave for church." Fourth, "sit together as a family during the worship service and encourage each one to actively participate and engage their minds in worship." Fifth, "begin bringing your children with you to the worship services when they are young." Sixth, "when you return to your home after the worship service, talk about what took place." Seventh, "be with your family on the Lord's Day." Eighth, "read with your family. Teach your children to love good books." Ninth, "look for opportunities to exercise hospitality." Tenth, "exercise compassion. Take your kids with you and visit someone who is lonely, someone who is hurting, someone who really would love to see children."

2. *Informal instruction.* This refers to instruction given at unplanned times. "And the words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut.6:6-7). "Parents must watch for all opportunities to instill instruction into the souls of their little folks. They are narrow-mouthed vessels, and things must be instilled into them drop after drop" (Mather).<sup>15</sup> "We parents are to talk to our children about God and His truth, not just when we instruct them during family worship, but as we go through the day, working at chores around the house, riding in the car on some errand, or engaging in wholesome leisurely pursuits. We are to take advantage of every opportunity to share the truths of the Lord with them" (Beeke).<sup>16</sup>

Though we should refrain from being buddies to our children, we should strive to achieve some of the same attitudes with our children that we share with our friends. A friend is someone I can talk to about anything on my heart or mind, whether the things of God or the things of this life. I can go back and forth between the two without feeling unholy if the talk turns from something spiritual to something natural; nor do I clam up when we talk about God. A true friend wants to know what is on my mind, what I'm struggling with, what makes me happy, what I am afraid of, and what I hope for.<sup>17</sup>

3. *Instruction by example.* "My Son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways: (Prov.23:26). "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil.4:9). "Much more shall a religious parent do by practice than by precept. Children are very inclined to follow their parents. Let them go before, children will soon follow after. Practice is plain proof of the precept" (Gouge).<sup>18</sup> "Do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. Imitation is a far stronger principle with children than memory. What they see has a much stronger effect on their minds than what they are told" (Ryle).<sup>19</sup> "The parent who tries to train without setting a good example is building with one hand, and pulling down with the other" (Ryle).<sup>20</sup>

Be an example in words, in temper, in diligence, in temperance, in faith, in charity, in kindness, in humility. Think not your children will practice what they do not see you do. You are their model picture, and they will copy what you are. Your reasoning and

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Hartman, *Homeward Bound*, 127-133

<sup>15</sup> Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 11

<sup>16</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 89

<sup>17</sup> Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 89

<sup>18</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:125

<sup>19</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room*, 312

<sup>20</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room*, 313

your lecturing, your wise commands and your good advice; all this they may not understand, but they can understand your life.<sup>21</sup>

(1) In your use of public and private means. "Be an example of reverence for the Word of God, reverence in prayer, reverence for means of grace, reverence for the Lord's Day" (Ryle).<sup>22</sup> "Children have their eyes always upon their parents, and are quick to discern any violations of consistency. If they witness us inconstant in our attendance upon private, family, or public worship, what can they conclude but that our religion is mere profession" (James).<sup>23</sup>

(2) In your willingness to acknowledge sin. When you sin, acknowledge it and openly and humbly repent from it. In so doing, you will teach your children that Christians are far from sinless and that God is ever gracious. "Children are not looking for perfect parents, and they are remarkably forgiving. It is hard to keep secrets from anyone when we live under the same roof. Children are always reading the books of our lives" (Beeke, 85).

(3) In your love and appreciation for the saints. Never openly criticize a brother or the minister, but speak honorably and lovingly of others.

Be not forward to speak of the faults of your fellow Christians, and when the subject is introduced, let it be in a spirit of charity towards the offender, and of decided abhorrence of the fault. Many parents have done irreversible injury to their children's minds by a proneness to find out, to talk of, and almost to rejoice over the inconsistencies of professing Christians. Never cavil at, nor find fault with the religious exercises of the minister your attend; but rather commend his discourses, in order that your children may listen to them with greater attention.<sup>24</sup>

(4) In your love and obedience to God's law. "If we would have our children live in the fear of God, we must ourselves be seen by them steadily walking in the way of His commandments. In alluring them to religion, we must be able to say, "Follow me"" (James).<sup>25</sup> "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps.119:97). Our children must see a consistency in regulating our lives by the law of God.

(5) In your confident faith in God and His promises. "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the gold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab.3:17-18). "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1Thess.5:16-18).

(6) In your love and submission to your spouse. An unloving husband preaches another Christ, and an un-submissive wife portrays a false church.

(7) In your compassionate love for sinners. Never speak of lost sinners in a haughty or condescending way. Never speak of them without humility and compassion. "Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law" (Ps.119:136). One sure way to breed little self-righteous Pharisees, is to portray ourselves as morally superior. Yes, Christians are different, but they are no better by nature.

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<sup>21</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room*, 312

<sup>22</sup> J.C. Ryle, *The Upper Room*, 312

<sup>23</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 149

<sup>24</sup> John Angell James, *The Christian Father's Present to His Children*, 27-28

<sup>25</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 147-148