



When thou sittest in thine house

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Father's influence in the covenant home

Evil things are happening in homes and families in our land. Daily media reports are sometimes shocking, even unimaginable. There is the shameful abuse of women and children, sexual sins, sometimes committed by fathers violating their own children. We read of the most horrible atrocities imaginable, such as parents murdering their own children, and children their own parents. Even natural affection in the home seems in some cases to be utterly absent. All of these things are clear evidences that we are living in the last days, days of increasing wickedness in the world in which we live. May the Lord in His great mercy preserve us in this evil world, for sometimes these sins come close to us, and we know we are capable of committing them.

We could mention other signs of the deep trouble and distress of the youth in our land. There is increasing apostasy in the church. This takes many forms. One

of them is that young people are leaving the church in droves. Many churches have only the aged who remain and gather for worship on the Lord's Day. Sometimes these parents experience great anguish that their children and young people are gone from the church. Sometimes they do not even care that this is happening. Many in our generation have little or no spiritual interest, and if at all instructed in the home and by the church, when these children grow up to adulthood they leave the church.

Some of the apostasy taking place in the church involves young people who leave doctrinally sound churches, true churches once founded on such doctrine. They then join themselves with mega-churches, where there is little importance given to sound doctrine. All the emphasis in these nominal churches is on feeling excitement, the attraction of large numbers, and popular

entertainment styles of worship services. Young people grow up unable to discern truth from error. Many of the younger generation are totally careless about sound doctrine. Popular preachers in mega-churches draw large audiences through promoting pop-psychology and feel-good religion. Others attract the masses by exhorting their members to be involved in all kinds of community action and social issues of the day. They spread the popular philosophy that convinces people that this is where true religion is to be found. As long as you are active in the church doing good in society, perhaps even going to a faraway third-world country where you can be involved in human concerns, world peace, the education of children, cultural renewal, projects that help alleviate world poverty, and assisting where natural catastrophes have happened, then you are involved where Christianity is truly active and significant in the world. Preaching salvation, righteousness, and truth are not important or relevant. Preserving truth and righteousness as the foundation for life, living for and confessing God and Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation, are not considered important and relevant for Christianity. Promoting God's glory in a life of true godliness in things like Christian marriage, family life, and the communion of God's people in His church is just not relevant, and most of that is considered nothing but hypocrisy.

The truly Reformed church maintains the truth of the covenant, according to which God is pleased to continue His church in the line of continued generations of faithful believers. The gospel must be faithfully preached by the true church of Jesus Christ. The truth of the gospel and sound doctrine must be preserved and maintained in her midst. Importantly, arising out of this perspective is the great urgency of instructing our children in God's foundational institution of the Christian family.

In this article and my next I want to focus on the role and calling of fathers in the covenant home, with what has been said as the background and context. Never before has there been such great urgency of having good fathers in the home as there is today. There is great need for fathers to have a strong influence in their covenant homes. The failure and negligence of covenant fathers in the home will have devastating consequences for the strength of family and for the stability of society, even for our own churches and their future. In our special focus on fathers we are, of course, not minimizing the important role of covenant mothers as keepers in the home. We are simply recognizing the emphasis that Scripture places on fathers in that they are called to be the heads and strong leaders of their homes, greatly influencing their covenant children by

instructing them in the fear of the Lord, by the grace and Spirit of God.

In order for fathers to have the godly influence they ought to in their homes, they must themselves be men who are truly godly, fearing God and keeping His commandments. They themselves must be spiritually minded and have great spiritual concern for their children. They must also love the church of Jesus Christ and the truth God has given to her, the doctrine she is called to maintain and promote in the world and in the sphere of God's covenant.

Fathers have the God-given relationship to their children that they can by the grace of God have a great influence on their children's lives by instructing them in the truth and guiding them in the way in which these children must go. A father must be a living example of our Father in heaven in his family, so that believing children will experience the love, care, and comfort of their fathers and submit themselves to his necessary discipline and chastisement for their nurture and development to mature adulthood.

Because of this influence, fathers can also do great evil in their own homes. There is the sober warning of God's judgment in His law where God warns that He will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation (Ex. 20:5). The wickedness of fathers in the covenant home will have serious consequences of apostasy from the truth in the generations of the church. As fathers, we should all tremble before this warning of the law of God and earnestly pray that God will deliver us from our own personal sins and that He will not cause our sins to have a negative effect on the attitudes and behavior of our children.

Fathers can do great evil in their own marriages and families by their wicked lives. It cannot be denied that there are devastating consequences in families when fathers behave in an ungodly manner. When fathers walk in covetousness, pride, greediness, adultery, divorce, and drunkenness, they will bear evil fruit in the home and family. Even sins such as self-centeredness, unholy ambition, and worldliness will influence the children growing up in the homes of these fathers. God is not mocked; a father will reap what he sows.

Even fatherly neglect of the children will have serious consequences in his family. The father who does not have covenantal love and concern for his children will leave them feeling unloved and uncared for. As covenant children, they need this constant demonstration of love and concern for their own spiritual development, nurture, and sense of wellbeing. The absence of this will often leave deep feelings of bitterness, distress, and confusion within the souls of children.

A worldly father will teach his children to be worldly. A worldly man who does not live his own life in the fear of God will find that his children do not have within them the fear of God, which according to Scripture should be the guiding principle of their lives. A man who is overly committed to his earthly career and occupation, only to increase his wealth and his company's prosperity so that he does not have the time or energy personally to interact with and influence his children, must not be surprised when his children in later life show little of the fear of God in their lives, in their involvement in the church, and for walking in the good works God has ordained for them to walk in for His glory.

Having said all of the above, we must immediately also comfort faithful fathers in their difficult role. We are completely dependent on the grace of God and the work of His Spirit in the hearts and lives of our children. God in His mercy will also preserve our children in spite of the sins and weaknesses of fathers in the daily task of raising covenant children.

Even in covenant homes where father has been faithful, there are some who still experience the great sorrows and anguish of children who in later life depart from the truth in which they have been instructed, even forsaking the Lord altogether for a life of sin and worldliness. God-fearing fathers must not despair of God's mercy and wrongly burden themselves with guilt feelings about their own failings and short-comings. They must continue to labor with wayward children, continuing in much prayer that God according to His will and in His great mercy might return wayward sons and daughters of the covenant.

To such wayward children the godly father must be able to say with humility and the grace of God in his own heart, "My son, my daughter, you have grown up in our covenant home. I have instructed you in the fear of God, in keeping His commandments and in confessing and living by the Lord's truth in your whole life. I have taught you by the example of my own life of the personal sacrifices you must make in life as well as of the ridicule and persecution you must expect from this ungodly world. I have taught about the only hope of salvation as it is in Jesus Christ alone. I have instructed you in the way of truth and righteousness, and of the great reward of

the Lord's blessing on the lives of His people in the way of fearing Him. I have taught you that which I believe in my own heart is the greatest wisdom and the greatest good that will lead to peace with God, life eternal, and glory. But you have willfully and foolishly rejected all of this and chosen the way of wickedness and forsaken the Lord. For this also God will hold you responsible."

Much of this article has been about warning; it has been somewhat negative, necessarily so. In our next article we are going to discuss the positive instruction of God's Word summarized in one of the classic passages of the Bible, Ephesians 6: 4. "And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This one short verse is full

of instruction and encouragement to fathers for their role in their covenant home. This verse is such a great example of verbal inspiration. Every word of this passage in its precise meaning has such great importance. This passage has a negative part to it. In raising of our covenant children, we must be careful not to provoke them to anger. There is great warning here about our behavior towards

our covenant children. We want soberly to consider some of the misbehavior and neglect of fathers that can lead to provoking our children to wrath.

Yet, this passage also has volumes of positive instruction and encouragement. Central to this whole passage, as well as to the whole book of Proverbs (written especially for the instruction of our covenant sons and daughters by their parents and again especially for fathers), is one great principle. I refer to the great principle, "the fear of the Lord." Fathers must instruct their children in the fear of the Lord. Through all their work fathers must labor by the grace and Spirit of God to instill and increase in the hearts of their children the attitude of "the fear of the Lord." Because of our natural pride, sometimes also sinful and worldly, we want our children to grow up to be successful in life, hopefully even more successful and prosperous than we were. We want our children to have honor among men and success in all their lives. We desire them to reveal that they are very intelligent, gifted, and talented. But we must always be reminded that without the fear of the Lord all of this is nothing more than the vanity of the world and in the end will profit our children very little.

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