

# The Christian Family

## Chapter 8: Family Worship

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In a day when modern culture is hostile to the Christian family and when most evangelical churches have long ago abandoned household devotions we would do well to consider the need, importance and practice of the biblical duty of family worship. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “God is to be worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence calls there unto” (21:6).

Before we examine the parts of family worship, we first need to set forth the biblical reasons why this practice is a Christian duty. Given the fact that in the twentieth century family worship has largely been set aside and replaced by age-segregated Sunday school and youth groups, an examination of the divine warrant for this forgotten practice is in order. There are a number of scriptural reasons why family worship must be the practice of every Christian family.

(1) Fathers, who are the covenant heads of families, are responsible to lead, teach, set an example and command their families in the way of the Lord. “And these 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” (Dt. 6:6-7). “Remember the days of old, Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you.... Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe all the words of this law” (Dt. 32:7, 46). “Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:1-8). “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Pr. 6:4; cf. Pr. 4:1-4). These passages do not specifically mention family worship. Father led household devotions, however are an aspect or subset of these general commands or principles. (More specific injunctions and examples will be considered in a moment.)

(2) There are a number of historical examples in Scripture where godly covenant heads carefully maintained family religion. After God called Abraham out of his native land He promised the land of Canaan to his descendants (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 14:18-21). When God made a covenant with Abraham, it included his household and descendants (Gen. 17:7-8). Abraham as the covenant head of the family was to apply the covenant sign (circumcision) not

only to himself, but to his entire household, including babies (Gen. 17:10-14). Why did God establish a covenant relationship with Abraham? A major reason was so that Abraham would give godly instruction to his family. “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Gen 18:19). “Now God did thus acknowledge Abraham as His intimate friend, not for Abraham’s sake only but, as He specifically says, that what is thus conveyed to him might be passed on to posterity. In fact, it was to be delivered as a solemn injunction (*yetsawweh* = ‘he may enjoin’) to his own children as well as to the entire household.”<sup>1</sup> Calvin writes, “And the simple meaning of the passage is, that Abraham is admitted to the counsel of God, because he would faithfully fulfill the office of a good householder, in instructing his own family.”<sup>2</sup>

Jehovah is very concerned with generational covenant faithfulness. This faithfulness cannot be achieved through a mere externalism, but flows through the faithful spiritual instruction of the family. God places Abraham, and by implication all covenant heads, in the roll of a prophet. They are to teach “righteousness and justice” to their households. Covenant heads must instruct in “the righteousness which is by faith” as well as covenant obedience to God’s law word as the fruit of saving faith. “Let God by His providence dispose of the affairs of my family, and by his grace dispose the affections of all in my family, according to his will to his own praise. Let me and mine be only, wholly, and for ever His.”<sup>3</sup>

Both Isaac and Jacob followed the godly example of Abraham. “They, as well as he, built an altar to the Lord wherever they pitched their tents; an altar, then, being a necessary utensil for divine worship. This you will find repeatedly in the short history we have of these patriarchs, particularly in Genesis 26:25; 28:18, and 33:20.”<sup>4</sup> These godly men of old worshiped the Lord Jesus Christ through ceremonial types and shadows as covenant households. We who have more light, who look back to the perfect-completed work of Christ must also worship the Savior in and with our families.

Family worship was also the practice of godly Noah. In Genesis we read that God made a covenant with Noah, his household and every living creature (Gen. 9:12, 14-15). As soon as Noah and his family departed from the ark, he built an altar and offered a burnt offering of every clean animal (Gen. 8:20). Through the topology of animal sacrifice Noah worshiped Jehovah and set before his family a glimpse of the coming redeemer Jesus Christ.

We are given even more information regarding family worship in the life of Job. “So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify 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 sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did regularly” (Job 1:5). Earlier we noted that Abraham was a prophet to his household, instructing them to do righteousness and justice. Here we encounter Job interceding on behalf of his children; acting as a priest, praying and offering sacrifices on their behalf. Matthew Henry writes, “Job, like Abraham, had an altar for his family, on which, it is likely, he offered sacrifice daily; but, on this extraordinary occasion, he offered more sacrifices than usual, and with more

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<sup>1</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Warburg Press, 1942), 545-546.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 481.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, “On Family Religion” in *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1855]), 1:250.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Davies, “The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion” in *The Godly Family: Essays on the Duties of Parents and Children* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 18.

solemnity, according to the number of them all, one for each child. Parents should be particular in their addresses to God for the several branches of their family. 'For this child I prayed, according to its particular temper, genius, and condition,' to which the prayers, as well as the endeavours, must be accommodated. When these sacrifices were to be offered. (1.) He rose early, as one in care that his children might not lie long under guilt and as one whose heart was upon his work and his desire towards it. (2.) He required his children to attend the sacrifice, that they might join with him in the prayers he offered with the sacrifice, that the sight of the killing of the sacrifice might humble them much for their sins, for which they deserved to die, and the sight of the offering of it up might lead them to a Mediator."<sup>5</sup>

The father's responsibility to lead his household in the true faith of Jehovah is exemplified in the life of Joshua. Joshua did not hold up to a philosophy of headship whereby he held his finger up to the wind and followed the backsliding church. On the contrary, he regarded the covenant loyalty toward God of his whole family to be his responsibility even if the whole nation did slide into apostasy. "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:14-15).

The heads of households are to rule as a king over their little flock for good. Covenant faithfulness is not something that can be delegated to a youth pastor or a Sunday school teacher. Covenant heads are not to put up with a mixed religion. When denominations were casting aside biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement of our Lord and biblical ethics, heads of households should have been teaching their families the truth and separating themselves from apostasy. When Reformed denominations were corrupting the worship of God with human additions and were embracing feminism, covenant heads should have done their job to stop declension. Fathers must not neglect their convenantal duty. They must insure purity of doctrine, worship and ethics among their own parish-the household. Matthew Henry writes, "It is a good thing when a man hath a house of his own, thus to convert it into a church, by dedicating it to the service and honor of God, that it may be a Bethel, a house of God, and not a Bethaven, a house of vanity and iniquity.... Look upon your houses as temples for God, places for worship, and all your possession as dedicated things, to be used for God's honour, and not to be alienated or profaned."<sup>6</sup>

The Bible teaches that fathers (the heads of households) must consider themselves to be the prophet, priest and king of their own particular households. As a prophet they are obligated to

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n. d.), 3:5.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion," 250-251. William Garden Blaikie writes, "For his absolute and supreme loyalty to his Lord he is entitled to our highest reverence...Among the reformers, the puritans, and the covenanters such men were often found. The best of them, indeed, were men of this type, and very genuine men they were. They were not men whom the world loved; they were too jealous of God's claims for that, and too severe on those who refused them. And we have still the type of the fighting Christian. But alas! It is a type subject to fearful degeneration. Loyalty to human tradition is often substituted, unconsciously no doubt, for loyalty to God. The sublime purity and nobility of the one passes into the obstinacy, the self-righteousness, the self-assertion of the other. When a man of the genuine type does appear, men are arrested, astonished, as if by a supernatural apparition. The very rareness, the eccentricity of the character, secures a respectful homage. And yet, who can deny that it is the true representation of what every man should be who says, 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?'"

read God's word and instruct the family concerning the whole counsel of God. As a priest they are to pray for and with their families. They are to intercede on behalf of the household everyday. As a king they are to govern and direct them to obey the word of God. They also are to protect and provide for them. All three of these duties come together when a father leads his family in household worship. "[H]owever indifferent some governors may be about it, they may be assured that God will require a due discharge of these offices at their hands. For if, as the apostle argues, he that does not provide for his own house in temporal things has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel, to what greater degree of apostasy must he have arrived who takes no thought to provide for the spiritual welfare of his family?"<sup>7</sup>

There is no neutrality regarding this important matter of family worship. A father who neglects this duty, who does not have a family that worships the true and living God must question the character of his own faith in Christ. Note the categories of peoples that will receive the wrath of God. Jeremiah the prophet says, "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). One should not be surprised to read that the heathen who do not know Jehovah and thus are idolaters will receive God's fury. But what of those who make a profession of faith and join the visible church yet whose families are not calling upon Him? If God judges the heathen who do not know God what will He do to those who know the word of God yet refuse to obey it? Calvin writes, "Invocation then is ever the fruit of faith, as it is an evidence of religion; for all who call not on God, and that seriously, prove that they have never know anything of religion."<sup>8</sup> Is there anything more sad and terrifying to a father who professes Christ, than observing his own children apostatize because they were trained in the neglect and forgetfulness of God at home? Fathers, if you neglect this most important family duty now, then you will suffer upon a bed of tears and affliction later.

(3) A father's responsibility to lead his household in family worship also flows from the biblical concept of the family itself. When the apostle Paul addresses the Corinthian church he tells them that the children of believers holy (1 Cor. 7:14). As children of a believing parent they are set apart in a consecrated position before the Lord. Malachi the prophet says that one reason that God instituted marriage and the family was "to seek a godly seed" (2:15). In other words God wants His people to raise up godly children. The whole Bible views families organically. His covenants that were given to the heads of families applied to the whole family: babies, children and even slaves (Gen. 9:12ff; 12:3; 17:1-11; Ps. 89:26-29, etc.). Charles Hodge writes, "In the sight of God parents and children are one. The former are the authorized representatives of the latter; they act for them; they contract obligations in their name. In all cases, therefore, where parents enter into covenant with God, they bring their children with them....It is vain to say that children cannot make contracts or take an oath. Their parents can act for them; and not only bring them under obligation, but secure for them the benefits of the covenants into which they vicariously enter. If a man joined the commonwealth of Israel he secured for his children the benefits of the theocracy, unless they willingly renounced them. And so when a believer adopts the covenant of grace, he brings his children within that covenant, in the sense that God promises to give them, in his own good time, all the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal engagements."<sup>9</sup> In the Bible, circumcision and baptism have virtually the identical meaning (Col. 2:11-12; Rom. 4:11). Thus, we are not surprised to find that in the book of Acts whole families are baptized and included in the visible church (Ac. 10:24ff;

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<sup>7</sup> George Whitfield, "The Great Duty of Family Religion" in *The Godly Family*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:67.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3:555.

16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-16).<sup>10</sup> Does this mean that the children of believers are born regenerated and automatically become Christians? No. it does not. However, it does mean that parents, especially fathers (covenant heads) have a special responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). God promises faithful parents a godly heritage. “And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them” (Is. 65:22-23).

As a result of the biblical view of covenant families, Bible-believing Presbyterian churches require parents to publicly agree to raise their children according to Scripture. Parents make a covenant to faithfully fulfill their covenant duties with regard to their children. Note the following example: “Do your promise to instruct your child in the principles of our holy religion as revealed in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church; and do you promise to pray with and for your child, to set an example of piety and godliness before him, and to endeavor by all the means of God’s appointment to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?”<sup>11</sup> Even Baptist churches implicitly recognize this duty when they engage in dedication ceremonies for the infants of Christian parents (i.e., covenant recognition without the covenant sign). All of this points to the duty and need for family worship. Can believing parents be faithful to the covenant vows taken at the baptism of their children who do not pray, praise and study God’s word with them? The answer is obviously not. Parents, you know that the most precious thing that God has given you is your children. Therefore, love them, nurture them and instruct them daily. Do not neglect family worship. Make it a top priority in your home.<sup>12</sup>

## What to Do in Family Worship

Family worship should be a simple affair consisting of three basic elements: Bible reading and instruction, prayer and the singing of praise. As we briefly consider these three areas, keep in mind the following principles. First, it is very important that family worship be

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<sup>10</sup> For an excellent exposition of the Reformed understanding of infant baptism, read: Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970). For a broader societal analysis of the Baptist position, read James B. Jordan, editor, *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School, 1982). Regarding historical examples from Scripture, Robert Shaw writes, “But those who defer the baptism of the children of professing Christians until they arrive at adult age, have no precedent or example for their practice; for, though the Book of Acts contains the history of the Church for upwards of thirty years, in which time for the children of those who were first baptized by the apostles must have reached maturity, yet we have no record of the baptism of a single individual born of Christian parents. From this silence, we justly infer that they must have been baptized in their infancy; and we defy the advocates of adult baptism to adduce a single scriptural example of their practice” (*An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* [Edmonton, Canada: Still water Revival Books, n. d. (1845)], 290).

<sup>11</sup> *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995), 146-147.

<sup>12</sup> When discussing family worship our emphasis has been on the duty of fathers toward their covenant children. We do not want to fail to mention that family worship is also an expression of a husband’s love and faithfulness toward his wife. Family worship contributes to the sanctification of the wife. It gives a wife an opportunity to ask questions and interact theologically with her husband. This theological interaction is great for the children. It shows them a zeal and love of Christ and His word by their own parents. It exhibits to them, that in this household Christianity is not merely theoretical, or esoteric, or only something for Sunday, but is very practical and meaningful-everyday. Indeed, family worship blesses the whole family.

conducted on a regular basis. Therefore, it is wise to set a specific time for the whole family to meet every day; that must be kept except only in a time of a dire emergency. Fixing the time of family worship and making it a non-negotiable daily event will eliminate the temptation to skip days and procrastinate because of various excuses (e.g., illness, fatigue, sporting events, TV programs, movies, etc.). Older books and sermons on family religion teach that family worship should be conducted twice each day. Such teaching is based on passages which speak of morning and evening prayers (e.g., Ps. 92:1-2; 141:2). Given the fact that such passages are speaking directly to private worship, fathers should commit themselves minimally to daily worship.

Second, the father (or in the case of a single parent household-the covenant head) is responsible to lead family devotions. This duty is not to be delegated to the wife, or adult child or house servant. The wife and children must be taught and directed by the covenant head of the household. The father is the prophet, priest and king of the family. He must read the Scriptures, ask questions, teach doctrine and lead in prayer.

Third, family worship should be simple, pleasant and not excessively long or formalistic. We are not gnostics or ascetics. Family worship should be something that the family looks forward to; thus, it does not need to be a theological marathon. Fifteen to twenty minutes each day should be sufficient for reading, discussion and prayer. Families that turn devotions into a lengthy, intricate affair often get worn out and end up skipping worship altogether. It is far better to be concise and consistent than excessive and irregular.

## The Basic Elements

(1) Fathers should read the Scriptures to their families. Knowledge of God's word is necessary for salvation, faith and life. The Bible is the foundation for meaning and ethics. It is a light that guides our path (Ps. 119:105). The Holy Scriptures are able to make a child wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). We should search the Scriptures daily in order to learn and test doctrine (Acts 17:11), for God's word is truth itself (Jn. 17:17). It is our guide for living that sanctifies our hearts and lives (Jn. 17:17). Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). God's word is to be in our hearts and it is to be diligently taught to our children (Dt. 6:6-7). Everything that we are required to believe and everything we are required to do is to be found within its pages. "It is better to be without bread in your houses than without bibles, for the words of God's mouth are and should be to you more than necessary food."<sup>13</sup> J. W. Alexander writes, "The daily reading of God's holy word, by a parent before his children, is one of the most powerful agencies of Christian life. We are prone to undervalue this cause. It is a constant dropping, but it wears its mark into the rock. A family thus trained cannot be ignorant of the Word. The whole Scriptures come repeatedly before the mind...No part of juvenile education is more important."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:251.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991), 62-63. A parental duty that many fathers include in family worship is the catechizing of children. The best catechism available teaching children and new believers is the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Although the memorization and discussion of the Shorter Catechism is something that all Christian families should do every day, it is not necessary to incorporate it into family worship. "Oblige them to learn some good catechism by heart, and to keep it in remembrance; and by familiar discourse with them hold them to understand it, as they become capable. It is an excellent method of catechizing, which God Himself directs us to, Deut. vi. 7, to teach our children the things of God, by talking of them as we sit in the house, and go by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up. It is good to keep up stated times for this service, and be constant to them, as those that know how industrious the enemy

How is the Bible to be read unto one's children? There are a number of things to keep in mind regarding this crucial duty. First, the Bible is to be read with authority and solemnity for it is the very word of God. Such reading instills in children a respect and holy reverence for the Scriptures. They learn that the Bible is not just any old book; or just another school book, but that it is truly unique. It alone has absolute authority. It alone merits an unqualified trust and obedience.

Second, the Bible is to be read in a manner that focuses the children's attention upon it. This means that fathers should read the Scriptures with a certain love, excitement and fervor. If a father exhibits boredom and sluggishness in his reading the children will sense it. By such an unenthusiastic example the father is implicitly teaching his children that the Bible is a dry, boring book. Our children should sense our love, joy and excitement of God's word by our reading of it. Further, a father should frequently pause and ask his children questions regarding the Scripture reading. The questions serve some important functions. a) They force the children to pay attention to what is being read so that they will not daydream and fail to learn the section of Scripture. b) They also enable a father to emphasize important doctrines and applications within the passage (e.g., "John, why does Paul say that no one can be saved by keeping the law?" or, "Susan, why did Jesus Christ have to suffer and die on the cross?"). Remember, the father is the prophet of the family: reading the Scriptures, rebuking sin, emphasizing doctrines, making applications, guarding against error and immorality. It is not surprising that a father who is diligent and applies himself to family worship will himself be a better father for it.

Third, a father should focus on quality not quantity. In other words a short reading (e.g., one chapter) with questions and comments is better than a long reading with no attention or application. Remember, family worship should be concise, to the point and regular. Readings that are very long without analysis can lead to daydreaming and restlessness in small children.

Lastly, the Bible should be read straight through from beginning to end in order to get the whole counsel of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(2) Fathers must pray with their families. As the priest of the family the father should approach the throne of grace and intercede for himself and his wife and children. "Families, as such have many errands at the throne of grace, which furnish them with matter and occasion for family prayer every day; errands which cannot be done so well in secret or public, but are fittest to be done by the family in consort, and apart from other families."<sup>15</sup> It is primarily through family worship that young children learn the importance of prayer and the biblical methodology of prayer. In prayer the whole family comes to God through Jesus as a covenantal body dedicated to the cause of Christ and truth.

There are a number of important things that should be a part of family prayer. First, families should acknowledge a total dependence upon God and His providence. In prayer we honor God and glorify Him for His infinite perfections. We acknowledge God's sovereignty and recognize the mediatorial kingship of Christ. Christ is the owner and master of this family. We acknowledge our dependence upon Him for salvation and all good things.

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is to sow tares while men sleep" (Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:252). In order to keep family devotions relatively short it would be wise to ask only a few catechism questions during family devotions and do the bulk of catechizing at another time. As children get older, going over the catechism can take twenty minutes, especially if more than one child is involved.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Henry, "On Family Religion" in *Works*, 1:254.

Second, families must confess their sins to God. In the Bible households are treated organically. When a part has engaged in wickedness and sin it can affect the whole. There are numerous examples of the iniquity of covenant heads bringing disaster upon families (e.g., Achan, Josh. 7:19-26; Baasha, 1 Ki. 16:3-4, 12; Ahab, 1 Ki. 21:21). There are even the sins of sons that bring calamity upon a whole family (e.g., the sons of Eli, 1 Sam. 3:13-14). Families must come together and confess their daily sins in thought, word and deed. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). We must strengthen each other's hand toward holiness, sincere repentance and a confession of guilt before God. "How sad is the condition of those families that sin together, and never pray together!"<sup>16</sup> Families often say and do things to each other that are contrary to God's word. A daily confession will reconcile a family with God and one another. It will instill in children the seriousness of sin and the great need of a daily repentance. Whitfield writes, "[T]here 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. But how this can be done without joining together in one common act of humiliation, supplication, and thanksgiving is difficult to devise."<sup>17</sup>

Third, families must thank God for all the blessings of life, especially the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. All the blessings of life—the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, even the air we breathe—comes from the beneficent hand of Jehovah. Should we not continually offer thanks to Him for these great gifts? Does He not also continually protect us from the evil one, from calamity and from our own foolishness (cf. Job 1:10; Is. 4:5)? The greatest gift of all to our families is Jesus Christ Himself. God has chosen us in Him and has united us with His life, death and resurrection. He has regenerated our hearts enabling us to believe in Christ. Because of Him we are Christian families. Jesus has had mercy upon our household. Emmanuel lives with us. "At the same time," says the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:1).

Fourth, families must pray to God for their physical and spiritual needs. Jesus instructed us to pray for our daily bread (Mt. 6:11). As families we are to jointly ask for physical prosperity, not so that we can live worldly lives and neglect our religious duties, but, so that as families we can better serve Christ and extend His kingdom. If we are to pray for our daily bread, then how much more ought we to pray for sanctification, the putting off of sin and deliverance from the evil one. As families we must pray "do not lead us into temptation" (Mt. 6:13). Households often suffer from similar infirmities and temptations. Children often imitate the bad habits and sinful tendencies of their parents. Families ought to identify problems, sinful habits and common temptations and pray together for deliverance and sanctification as a household.

Fifth, families must pray for the well-being of others. They must pray for all sorts of men. There are relatives, friends and acquaintances who need to be saved. There are believers who are suffering under various trials (sickness, injury, financial problems, etc.). There are Christians who are backsliding who need to awaken to their condition and repent. There are various missionaries who could use family intercession. There are civil and denominational conflicts and declensions that should be placed before the throne of grace. There are believers who are suffering severe persecution in far off lands at the hands of tyrants. "The benefit of prayer will reach far, because he that hears prayer can extend his hand of power and mercy to the utmost

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> George Whitfield, "The Great Duty of Family Religion" in *The Godly Family*, 38.

corners of the earth, and to them that are afar off upon the sea.”<sup>18</sup> “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

(3) Fathers must lead their families in the singing of praise. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). The singing of a Psalm or two to God is a proper response to the reading of Scripture and prayer. By doing so the family glorifies God and admonishes one another. Samuel Davies writes, “As to family praise, it is a duty because thanksgiving is so often joined with prayer in Scripture; Philippians 4:5; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; and psalmody must be admitted to be the most proper method of expressing thankfulness by such as accept it a part of divine worship. ‘The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous,’ Psalm 118:15; an expression that my properly signify praising God in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, as we are commanded, Colossians 3:16.”<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Fathers, consider the important duty that God has placed in your hands, the raising up of a godly seed. Consider your own precious covenant children; impress upon them the great truths of biblical Christianity when they are young and impressionable. Teach them to honor God with their hearts, minds, lips and hands from the most tender of years. Consider that your children are gifts from God made to serve the Lord. They are to carry forth the banner of Christ to the next generation. Do your job diligently so that while you are praising Christ in heaven your children will be serving and praising God on earth.

While it is true that only God can give grace to a soul, it is also true that He uses secondary means—the teaching of God’s word—to give the sum of saving knowledge to the elect. Fathers, consider your pain and misery if through carelessness and neglect your children learn the warp of the world instead of the way of the Lord. If you fulfill your covenant obligations by loving, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, encouraging and warning your children to trust in Christ and obey His law then you have done your part and with peace of soul you may comfortably leave your children in the hands of God. Covenantally faithful parents can rest upon God’s promises. May God enable us to fulfill our covenant duties to our children that Christ would be glorified in them.

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Henry, “A Family Religion” in *Works*, 1:256. Henry adds: “Praying families are kept from more mischiefs than they themselves are aware of. They are not always sensible of the distinction which a kind providence makes between them and others; though God is pleased sometimes to make it remarkable, as in the story which is credibly related of a certain village in the Canton of Bern in Switzerland, consisting of ninety houses, which in the year 1584 were all destroyed by an earthquake, except one house, in which the good man and his family were at that time together praying. That promise is sure to all of the seed of faithful Abraham, ‘Fear not, I am thy shield,’ Gen. xv. 1. Wisdom herself had passed her word for it, Prov. i. 33. ‘Whoso hearkeneth to me,’ wherever he dwells, he ‘shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from’ all real evil itself, and from the amazing, tormenting fear of evil. Nothing can hurt, nothing needs frighten those whom God protects. (Ibid. 1:259).”

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Davies, “The Necessity and Excellency of Family Religion” in *The Godly Family*, 21.

