

Appendix: Christian Parenthood: What does this Mean?

In the turmoil of our changing society, with materialism and secular humanism rapidly displacing Christian piety, it's so important that our children not be frustrated by the confusion surrounding them, but to "bring them up in the fear of God" (Eph. 6.4) who has revealed himself clearly to us. This daunting task is given exclusively to parents, the sole instruments God established to bring forth and preserve lives most vulnerable in infancy and childhood.

Parenthood can be a great blessing when it is carried out in the fear of God and under the counsel of God in his Word, diligently teaching God's eternal blessings into the hearts of God's children. But it's also a great responsibility for which God will hold parents accountable. **On judgement day, God will hold parents accountable** if they don't honor him or raise their baptized children as God's children, but as children of the world.

Faithful Christian parents, therefore, are mindful of God, especially God's promise to bless good parenting. But they also remember, on the other hand, to fear the consequences of neglecting the important task God's given them to raise their children as God's children.

What Does God Promise Us Parents?

Though Scriptures abound with stories, examples, admonitions, and warnings about faithful parenting, let's think about just one of those promises in the Bible:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22.6

While this might merely sound like a proverb or a wise 'guideline' this is God's promise to parents that he will not break, and as this promise is in the Book of Salvation, its greatest application is to your child's salvation.

If you train your child in the ways of God he will not depart from it! If you train him to walk away from God and his ways, you've taught him to keep on departing from God. No, you didn't die for your child's sin, Christ did. But your child's salvation depends on you and your training him rightly. If you teach your child the way of Christ, he will be saved! That's God's promise. But teaching him to oppose God also has a certain outcome!!

What does "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6.4) Mean ?

In the rite of Baptism, children are given Baptism. Christ has appointed that as the means by which children, born to us sinners as sinners, are born again by the power of Christ's death and resurrection. Through water and the Word, water and the Spirit, God makes them his children. As such God becomes their Father and the church their mother and they become part of the household of faith, God's family. In that rite, the path of God's children's 'nurture and admonition' is described for sponsors, who are to help and remind parents of their responsibility, as follows:

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church sponsors are to confess the faith expressed in the Apostles' Creed and taught in the Small Catechism. They are, whenever possible, to witness the Baptism of those they sponsor. They are to pray for them, support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith, and encourage them toward the faithful reception of the Lord's Supper. They are at all times to be examples to them of the holy life of faith in Christ and love for the neighbor. (LSB 269)

So to repeat and summarize, it is a parents' responsibility, in "bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" to . . .

- speak the faith to his child,
- remind him of his baptism (he belongs to God, not the parent)
- see that he grows in faith by instruction in the Bible/Catechism.
- teach him unto worthy, **life long reception of Holy Communion**, the **means of his child's future sanctification** found only in the church, without which he will not see God.
- **himself be an example in being sanctified**, growing in faith to God and in love for the neighbor, possible only by God's grace.

Do you intend to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord -or- to teach him the path away from God, his Father??

How Does this Promise of 'not departing' Apply to Me as a Christian Parent?

Look again at the promise (two pages back) from Proverbs 22. Many point out children who have been baptized, attended Lutheran Schools, even through college, who become heathen; rank unbelievers. I've had elderly mothers look to me with tears in their eyes and say, "I did everything I could and they still departed from the faith." And the suggestion by these 'good Christian' moms is that, perhaps, God's promise isn't true.

So since my child departs from the faith, what God said must not be true!?! With all empathy for a mom's legitimate despair over her child being 'lost', I must honestly tell her, after I tell myself as a parent, NO! It's not God who has failed. It's we parents who fail, isn't it? When God tells us to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, guess what, we don't, none of us. None of us perfectly live at enmity with God's enemy, the world; nor, by word and deed, perfectly teach our children all the evils God hates and tells us to avoid in the world, lest we be spiritually ruined or lost. None of us perfectly correct our children in their sinful ways, but we err, we tolerate and allow what Christ doesn't. None of us, even if we go to church weekly and have family prayers and devotions every day, meet God's standard in being examples to our children of being people who love and honor God's Word, who **render the unconditional obedience that the authority of God's Word deserves in our lives**. God's promise is true. And inasmuch as we have **NOT** taught our children the good path they should walk, they are doomed to the sinful paths we, as sinners, teach our children. It's not God who fails and can be blamed, we all fall short, even as parents. Lost children merely follow us, their parents, as sinners who often won't admit our own sins and failings, who won't seek God's grace for our sins where he placed it for all, parents and children, in Word and Sacrament, in Christ's church. So what hope is left for us in this promise?

Hope in grace, alone. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Children need better parents than we are. Where will they get them? By grace. If you confess your sins and seek God's help for your failures with your children, he will forgive you. He'll turn your evil failings into good for your children, and help you improve. If you don't, why should he help you when you refuse and don't believe in the help he's explicitly commanded you to use. **YOU** be a Christian. **YOU** use God's grace in God's Word and Sacraments. **Else God has no other help or hope for YOU** and God's law promises your children will follow you in your own hypocrisy and unbelief!

How Do I, a Sinner, Honor God as a Father or Mother?

You can first be a 'good parent' to your child when you yourself become 'a good child of God,' that is, when you become a good member of God's household, the church; when you begin to heed God's anger for your sins and stand in line with your fellow sinners to receive his grace in the church. Taking communion, even every day, will not help you improve as a Christian or parent, if you do not engage and know and confess your struggle against sins still living in your flesh that would separate you and God. Communion only helps when you confess to your heavenly Father your need to be sanctified, your need to still learn from God, to grow and improve, your struggle against your sinful flesh, the world and the devil, and your total dependance upon your Father's grace and Biblical guidance. Only when you become God's child and heed your Father's voice, will God's voice speak in your parenting. Only then will you be an instrument in his hands for your child, and you will always be able to depend on him even as you remain imperfect, in need of his grace, sanctification and help.

So what does this mean? How do I honor God as a sinner who is also the parent of a child of God? What must I do?

- Admit my sins and failings as a parent, and confess them.
- Learn to love the truth and what is good and hate what is a lie and evil in both doctrine and life.
- Receive absolution from the pastor as from God for the sins, also parental sins, that I know and feel in my heart.
- Having confessed and being absolved, receive holy Communion often for my improvement/sanctification without which I won't ever become holy and see God.
- Recognize I won't grow in faith or love without Christ and his Wisdom found only in God's Word, the Bible.
- Ask God for a desire to learn, so I can also teach my children
- Recognize I need help in teaching my children the faith and **seek the help of godly teachers in our Grade- and Sunday School** who will affirm the good example I want to set for my children.
- Teach by word and example that the Word of God is the treasure of heaven that will not pass away, to be valued above all things, even life itself; that rejecting God's Word is rejecting God himself.

So we most honor God when we recognize our sins harm our children, we learn and confess our sins and failings as parents, and trust in God's grace to forgive us and correct our failings as only God, **our Father**, can.