

How to Have A Family Altar

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CHAPTER THREE

The Family Altar and the Blessing of Prevention and Promise

STILL OTHER GREAT BLESSINGS of the family altar are those of prevention and promise. Someone has said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is just as true in the spiritual as in the physical realm. What does the family altar prevent? It prevents the soul-starvation of the members of your family, of the children in particular.

In Matthew 18:8 JESUS said something very severe and something that should stimulate every parent to some real self-examination: **"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."** (Also Mark 9:42)

What is this great offense against which JESUS speaks in such scathing words? Remember JESUS said **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"** (Matthew 4:4). It would be an offense against a child's body to deny him the bread of earth, for our Lord's statement clearly witnesses to the need of that kind of bread. But it is time that we all, and parents in particular, should remember just what JESUS said, **"Man shall not live by bread alone"**; yet thousands of children every day in so-called Christian homes are fed only physical bread.

Bad enough to starve a child's body day after day, but what shall we say of those parents who starve his never dying soul? Every night thousands of children are put to bed starved for the Word of GOD, having received nothing of GOD's Word from their parents that day. Think of the terrible soul-damning crime of it.

A child starved for the only bread which can win for him CHRIST and keep him clean for GOD; robbed of the only bread that can give him strength and wisdom to overcome all the wiles of the devil!

We believe much juvenile delinquency is merely a symptom of soul and spiritual starvation! The Sunday school cannot in any wise replace the vital need for a daily diet of GOD's Word in the home around the family altar. A child cannot live spiritually on one meal a week any more than he can live physically on one meal a week.

And for that matter, adults can't live on one meal a week either. **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."** Many parents scold their disobedient children but never seem to realize that they themselves are to blame, because they do not teach them GOD's Word. Apart from GOD's Word there is no basis or power for obedience in the child.

Sarah A. Cooke in her splendid book, *Ways and Sketches*, gives this experience:

"While holding meetings years ago in Valparaiso, Indiana, a mother gave this testimony: 'I was left with five children. My oldest boy became wicked, and I could do nothing with him; he would lie and steal and I began to think that I would have to put him in the reformatory. One night I dreamed that a voice came to me telling me to read the Bible with my children, although I had a beautiful one for an ornament on the parlor table. I began to read it with the children, and oh, what a difference it made in our home!

The children would gather around me as gentle as kittens; and my eldest boy, two or three days after I commenced, broke down and, putting his arms around my neck, promised me would be a good boy and be saved.'"

When we think of prevention, we should also think of how our young people by the scores are being filled with soul-destroying unbelief, in atheistic, modernistic, and secular schools, universities, and seminaries. Daily our children are subject to unbelieving teachers and are taught the principles and theories of men who are ignorant of GOD's Word, lost and at enmity with the GOD of the universe. How necessary that this daily diet of poison, so subtly slipped in, should be daily counteracted by healthy doses of GOD's Word!

Never was there a time when parents needed to be more alert to the spiritual responsibilities to their children.

A godly home can counteract the soul-blighting influences of a secular, modernistic school. A godly mother can counteract the soul-destroying unbelief of a teacher or professor. But she cannot do it in her own strength, but only by the Word of GOD. O parents, diligently teach your children the blessed Word of GOD.

Scott in his comment on II Timothy 3:15-17, has the following wise word to say: "All religious error springs from ignorance, perversion, or misunderstanding of the Scripture: from overlooking, objecting to, or explaining away some part of them; or from adding men's notions, inventions, superstitions, or new revelations to them as of equal superior authority. The way therefore to oppose error is by promoting the solid knowledge of the Word of truth, especially by the faithful preaching of the Gospel; and the greatest kindness which we can do our children is to make them early acquainted with the Bible. Thus we shall do something important which may tend to preserve religion in the world, when we are removed out of it; and to perpetuate a succession of those who are established in the faith; wise unto salvation and thoroughly furnished unto good works.

"It is evident that the pious endeavors of Lois and Eunice, in making young Timothy acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, laid the foundation of all his subsequent usefulness in which he was inferior to none but the apostles. It is probable that while they were teaching the child to read, and to treasure up in his memory, '**oracles of God**' they little thought what a harvest in future life would spring from the seed thus sown. But the Scripture warrants high expectations in this respect; and it may be fairly said that the education of women in useful knowledge and genuine piety, in order that they might be qualified and disposed to instill good principles into the tender

minds of their young is one of the most important means and ways of diffusing the light of the gospel in the world."

The second great blessing of the family altar is that of a wonderful promise. The deepest desire of a Christian parent's heart is that the children will be saved and continue on in the way they should.

You really can have assurance in this matter. You can actually know that your children will walk in the ways of GOD to the end of their earthly pilgrimage. How can you have this assurance?

Turn with me to one of the greatest promises GOD ever made to the children of men - "**Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**" "Oh," you say, "that's Proverbs 22:6." It is a literal promise from GOD that if parents will fulfill the condition, "**Train up a child in the way he should go**" they may be assured of the results, "**and when he is old, he WILL not depart from it.**"

And I want to make clear that the promise doesn't mean that he may live away from GOD all his life till he is old and then get into the right way. We strongly resist all attempts to compromise or water down the forthright statements of GOD's blessed Word. Such watering down is the prelude of Modernism and the gateway to unbelief, and is usually a cover-up for our own failures and lack of faith!

Some will say as one man recently said "My wife's brothers were reared around the family altar and they are all wild and yet unsaved. How come? I don't believe we can have any assurance how our children will turn out, even if we do train them up in the way in which they should go." The truth is that there was a failure somewhere on the parents' part. If we believe Proverbs 22:6, then we must believe the failure is on the parents' side and not on the side of GOD.

We believe any parent who has a lost, straying, and wandering child will find upon honest self-examination that he has failed in some basic way to bring his child up in the way in which he should go.

Let us guide our experience in the light of GOD's Word!

In a moment we shall say a few words about the condition of this great promise, and we ask every parent to examine himself.

Gerry Stuart says in his sermon on "*The Christian Home*": "Not only does the happiness of the world center in the home, but the moral, social, and civil life of the world emanates from the home. Generally, the downfall of every character can be traced to some defect in the home life. The prettiest picture earth furnishes is a whole family on the way to Heaven; the most horrible picture is a whole family on the way to hell. I believe in the truth of the proverb of this Book: '**Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**'

A child properly trained up to the proper point will not go astray. The normal way to get rid of drunkards, liars, thieves and debauchees is to quit raising them.

Every man steps from the home door into the social, moral, and civil world. What he is upon the home step he will be in the field of life.

"Church life cannot rise higher than home life. I have no faith in the woman who talks of Heaven at church, and makes a hell out of her home. If I were investigating a woman's piety, I would rather take the evidence of the cook than of the preacher. Some men talk in church like angels, and talk to their families like demons. Church religion never goes above home religion. As we live in the home world, we will live in all worlds, whatever our profession is. It is the home that gives us our men and women. Brick and marble do not make a nation.

When GOD Himself would start a nation, He made the home life the deciding factor, and selected Abraham as the foundation on the ground set forth in my text. GOD knew him that he would command his children and his household after him, and GOD would therefore be able to **'bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'**"

GOD's ideal nation starts with the home, with the father of the home, walking in the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, his children and household following after him.

There is a condition to this promise to parents: **"Train up a child in the way he should go."** Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9. Can anyone fail to see there the family altar? Let me give you Deuteronomy 6:7, according to Matthew Henry's commentary: "Thou shalt whet them diligently upon thy children, so some read it; frequently repeat these things to them; try all ways of instilling them into their hearts: as in whetting a knife, it is turned first on this side and then on that.

Be careful and exact in teaching thy children and aim, as by whetting, to sharpen them, put an edge on them . . . and thou shall talk of these things with due reverence and seriousness for the benefit of not only thy children but of thy other domestics, thy friends, and thy companion, as thou sittest in thy house, either at work or at meat, or at rest, or to receive visits; when thou walkest by the way, either for diversion, or for conversation, or in journey, when at night thou art retiring from the family to lie down for sleep, and when in the morning thou art risen up and returnest to thy family again. Take all occasions to discourse with those about thee of Divine things; not of unrevealed mysteries or matters of doubtful disputation, but of the plain truths and laws of GOD, and the things that belong to our peace."

Let us put it this way: Deuteronomy 6:5-9 is the condition; fulfill it and Proverbs 22:6 will be the sure result.

And let us remember that the training of which GOD here speaks is the responsibility of parents toward their children.

Good advice does not fulfill this condition. Many parents give constant good advice and they think this is quite sufficient. No; GOD says in Deuteronomy 6:6 that parents shall diligently teach His Word to their children.

In Isaiah 28:9, 10 GOD says: **"Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.**

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

This is the family altar.

In Deuteronomy 11:18, 19, 21, GOD says: **"Therefore shall ye lay up these words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up . . . that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children . . . as the days of heaven upon the earth."**

Matthew Henry's comments on Proverbs 22:6: "Here is first a great duty enjoined, particularly to those that are the parents and instructors, in order to the propagating of wisdom, that it may not die with them. Train up children in that age of vanity to keep them from the sins and snares of it; in that learning age to prepare them for what they are designed to. Catechize them, initiate them, keep them under discipline, train them as soldiers who are taught to handle their arms, keep rank and observe the word of command. Train them up not in the way they would go or in which the bias of their corrupt hearts would draw them aside, but in the way they should go, which, if you love them, you would have them go. Train up a child according as he is capable (some take it) with a gentle hand, as nurses feed little children with a little and often."

Scott on Proverbs 22:6 says: "When children are instructed from infancy in the truths and ways of GOD, when they are inured to submission, industry, and the government of their passions; when they are restrained and corrected with a due mixture of firmness and affection; when they are trained up as soldiers are disciplined to handle their arms, endure hardship, keep their ranks, and obey orders; and when all is enforced by good examples set before them, and constant prayers made for and with them, they generally retain the early impression even to old age.

If they turn aside to devious paths, they always have an inward check, and will frequently be brought back again; and the good will commonly be visible to the end of their lives. But a way of talking to children about religion, while they are left to contract bad habits, and to indulge in wayward tempers; and while they see little or nothing of the holy and lovely tendency of the Gospel in the conduct of their pastors or teachers, is very different from this admonition of the Lord, and often leaves a rooted prejudice in the mind against those truths of which they heard much, but perceived and experienced no good effects."

~ end of chapter 3 ~
