

February 21st, 2021

The Doctrine, Duty, and Delight of Family Worship

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Our children belong to God

As we have been teaching through 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul has instructed us on the several different relationships that Christians find themselves *and* how we can worship the Lord within those relationships. We've seen him address marrieds, divorcees, singles, and last week children. This week we are pressing pause on Corinthians so we can see what it means *practically* for our children to be called holy. Remember Paul said in **1 Corinthians 7:14** "... your children...they are holy." So what does that mean in our day to day lives? Two things. **First**, when Paul calls our children "holy" he's using covenantal language. The Puritan Benjamin Wadsworth once said: "God calls [our children] *His*...They belong to *Him* by covenant;¹ they have been solemnly consecrated to *His* service; and...will you not bring them up for *Him*?"² So that is the first thing that you and I must realize: our children are not our own. They belong to God and we don't have the right to raise them however we want.

We already worship

Secondly, it means that we have a most solemn and serious duty to engage in family worship. My argument this morning is *not* that we must start family worship in our homes. My argument is that we are already engaged in family worship. The only question is this: who does *your* family worship? It's

¹ This is a clear teaching from the book of **Ezekiel 16:20-21** Why was the Lord so upset when Judah was sacrificing their children in the fire to foreign gods? "And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne *to me*, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered *my children*...?"

² Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), pg. 79

impossible not to worship in your homes, because all of us are living for something, all of us are betting our lives on something, all of us are loving something—that’s worship. All of us have household gods. When Rachel left her father Laban to go with Jacob, **Genesis 31:19** says “ [when] Laban had gone to shear his sheep...Rachel stole her father's household gods.” Which gods will your children take from you when they leave your house?³ The god of materialism? “Got to get more stuff.” The god of comfort? “As long as I have peace.” The god of entertainment. “What is the next movie, video game, social media platform?” If we think that a couple of hours of worship at Church will offset the other six days of worship, we are deceiving ourselves. Our children will learn to ignore what their pastors say if they see their parents doing the same.⁴ As a general principle, our children just will adopt our household gods.⁵ “Family worship is the most decisive factor in how the home goes.”⁶ That's why Moses in our passage this morning makes family worship an absolute imperative. That’s where we are going this morning.

The Big Idea...

The Lord requires that we would teach *His children* how to love and worship Him with their heads. their hearts. and their hands

³ cf. Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology, Vol. 2: Faith in the Triune God*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 177-178

⁴ “Edwards was convinced that good parenting was essential to curtail societal ills and promote the continued growth of the church, saying that ‘family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are like to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be like to prosper and be successful (WJE 25:484).’” *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, Ed. Harry S. Stout, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), pg. 222

⁵ What will your family tree say? This is not without consequence. See the comparison of Jonathan Edwards vs. Max Jukes. <https://www.ywam-fmi.org/news/multigenerational-legacies-the-story-of-jonathan-edwards/>

⁶ Joel Beeke, *Family Worship*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), pg. 2

- ☆Family Worship Is Confessional (v.4)
- ☆Family Worship Is Affectional (v.5-6)
- ☆Family Worship Is Experiential (v.7-9)

I. Family Worship Is Confessional

What I mean *here* is that family worship is first and foremost to be grounded in the truth of the Bible. Family worship must confess the truths of Scripture.

The Shema: “The Most Fundamental Article of Religion”⁷

Now this passage in Deuteronomy is the most vital and foundational confession in all the OT. The Jews called this the Shema (Sheh MA), the Hebrew word for “Hear” at the beginning of v.4. As one author said “The Shema is Israel’s fundamental dogma, her magna carta. To preserve Israel’s faith, God bound covenant, confession, and [catechism] together in the Shema.”⁸ “To this day, [the Shema] is recited morning and evening by the Jews.”⁹ When Jesus was asked by a scribe in **Mark 12:28** “Which commandment is *the most important* of all?” How did He answer? It wasn’t “...love the LORD your God.” Rather He says in v.29: “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.’” *Then* Jesus says “And you shall love the LORD your God...” You see, before He commands us to *love* the LORD our God, He commands us to *know* who the LORD our God *is*. Family worship is first of all confessional. So let’s break up v.4 into three parts: **1)** The command; **2)** The congregation; and **3)** The confession

⁷ Van Mastricht, pg.

⁸ J.V. Fesko, *The Need for Creeds Today: Confessional Faith in a Faithless Age*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerAcademic, 2020),

⁹ *The Reformation Study Bible*, Ed. R.C. Sproul, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2015), pg. 263

1. The command

v.4 begins “*Hear, O Israel.*” Now this is in the imperative mood, it’s a command to hear. Not *merely* with the ears but with the mind. It’s a command to put this in our minds, to know it, to believe it, to hold fast to it. Truth is meant to be *understood* and grasped and pondered with the mind. The is fundamental difference between human beings and animals. We have rational souls that can understand that words are containers for meaning. The command here is that we would *believe* the meaning behind these words.

2. The congregation

v.4 continues “*Hear, O Israel.*” Who is Israel? Well of course physical Israel is the people who Moses led out of Egypt, who became a nation, through whom the prophets and the writings of the OT came. But there is also a spiritual Israel.¹⁰ Paul makes this clear in **Romans 2:28-29** “For no one is a Jew who is *merely one outwardly*, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is *one inwardly*, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” Paul is saying there is a *spiritual Israel*,¹¹ God’s elect, spanning

¹¹ Some of our Dispensational brothers call this “Replacement Theology” but that really is a pejorative term. No believing Jew is ever replaced by any believing Gentile. Every promise that God made to ethnic Israel either has been fulfilled or will still be fulfilled. But that truth doesn’t negate that we are now one body with them. Ephesians 2:12-22 “...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

both testaments, comprised of every true believer, both Jew and Gentile alike.¹² Therefore with confidence, we can look at the Shema, and know that although the historical context is different than ours, and some things have been put away by the coming of Christ, this command is still directed at us today, *because* we are spiritual Israel.¹³ So let's turn back to Deuteronomy 6.

3. The confession

So what are we supposed to *hear* and *believe*? v.4 continues “The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Notice how the word LORD is in caps? The Hebrew word is Jehovah. “Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one.” Now the religion of Judaism which has rejected Jesus as their Messiah looks at this verse and only sees singularity. The Unitarians see the same thing, claiming that Jehovah has only one nature, and one person. Jehovah's witnesses do the same. All point to this verse as definitive proof that the Trinity is an invented doctrine of Christianity. Doesn't it look *on the surface* like they have a good case? How do we answer? Well who does the OT declare *Jehovah* to be?

¹² No where is this more clear than the book of Galatians. Please turn there. Paul is arguing against the false divisions in Galatia drawn down ethnic lines. The Judaizers were saying that circumcision was necessary in order to be counted as the people of God. Paul outright refutes this calling it a false gospel. He says in 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring...” Every Christian is a true child of Abraham, meaning, we are *spiritual Israel*. This is how he concludes the book in 6:15-16. Look there with me. “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, *but a new creation*. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon *the Israel of God*.” Who is the Israel of God he is speaking of? v.15: *not* those who are *merely* circumcised, but those who are *a new creation*. How backwards would Paul be if he argued in this whole letter that Jews and Gentiles were really one body, and what mattered was *not* circumcision, *but* faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, only for him to take it all back by distinguishing *true Israel* from Gentile believers?

¹³ If you think that the Church is not Spiritual Israel, then the OT is completely irrelevant to us except for the fact that it teaches us history. How can we say that Psalm 23 is for us? “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Do we say that the LORD is not our shepherd, but only Israel's shepherd? No beloved, the Bible is one story, with one God, and one people—His elect.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all called Jehovah

God the Father is called Jehovah. **Isaiah 64:8** “But now, O LORD (Jehovah), you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”¹⁴

God the Son is called Jehovah. **Isaiah 44:6** “Thus says the LORD [Jehovah], the King of Israel [that’s God the Father] *and* his Redeemer, the LORD [Jehovah] of hosts: [the Redeemer—that’s God the Son] ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’”¹⁵

God the Holy Spirit is called Jehovah. **Psalms 139:1** “O LORD [Jehovah], you have searched me and known me!” Who is it that searches us and knows us? Jehovah the Spirit. **v.7** “Where shall I go from *your Spirit*? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” Do you realize that even the great promise of the New Covenant was uttered by Jehovah the Spirit. **Jeremiah 31:33** says “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD [Jehovah].” When the book of Hebrews explains this covenant, it explicitly says that it is Jehovah the Spirit who spoke these words (**Hebrews 10:15-17**).¹⁶

God is in the plural

So which *Jehovah*—which LORD—is **Deuteronomy 6:4** referencing? All three. The very next phrase *emphasizes* this: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord *our God*.” The Hebrew word for God is ‘*ēlōhîm*. It is plural. The singular is el-o’-ah. The plural is used here. Jehovah is a God of plurality. You can hear it in **Genesis**

¹⁴ Also see Isaiah 63:16

¹⁵ cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/is-Jesus-Yahweh.html> Accessed February 20, 2021

¹⁶ cf. <https://www.bible.ca/trinity/trinity-holy-spirit-personality-deity.htm> Accessed February 20, 2021

1:26 when God created man. “Then God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness...”¹⁷

The LORD is one

But lest we get the wrong idea of what that means, the Shema ends by saying: “The LORD our God, *the LORD is one.*” So yes there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—but there is only one essence.

The Athanasian Creed (4th century)

“...we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither blending their persons
nor dividing their essence.

For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.

But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

...

Thus the Father is God,
the Son is God,
the Holy Spirit is God.

Yet there are not three gods;
there is but one God.

...

Just as Christian truth compels us

¹⁷ Furthermore all three of these Divine Person are often in the same verse in the OT. **Isaiah 48:16** “Draw near to me [Jehovah the Son], hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord God [Jehovah the Father] has sent me, and his Spirit [Jehovah the Spirit].” (cf. Isaiah 11:1-2; Isaiah 61:1). The doctrine of the Trinity did not originate in the NT

to confess each person individually
 as both God and Lord,
 so [it] forbids us
 to say that there are three gods or lords.¹⁸

What the Israel of God must confess

What does all this mean? How does this relate to family worship? Because it defines *who* your family *will worship*. Beloved, don't you realize this this one confession renounces all other gods and all other belief systems on the planet? Atheism, Buddhism, and Secularism are rejected—there is a God, His name is Jehovah—and the earth and its fullness belong to Him. It rejects the unitarian religions of Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses. It rejects the beliefs of Hinduism and Mormonism which are polytheistic religions claiming there are multiple gods. It rejects the belief of Modalists who believe that there are not three distinct Persons in the Trinity, but different modes in which God manifests Himself. In other words, this confession renounces all religions except Christianity. You cannot be the true Israel of God—the Church—unless you believe this about God.¹⁹ Why? Two reasons. **First**, how can you rightly love and worship the LORD *if* you don't rightly confess who He is? Don't you see that is why Jesus *first* said "The most important [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: *The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*'" And then He said "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (**Mark 12:29-30**). I was recently speaking to an unbeliever on the phone who was struggling with finding forgiveness for his sins in Jesus Christ. I asked him if he sincerely called out on the Lord for mercy, if he asked for forgiveness. He said yes. At first I was puzzled, because I believe

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/athanasian-creed> Accessed February 20, 2021

¹⁹ "All other deities are brought to nought, and [we] are commanded to [flee] and detest whatever withdraws [our] minds from the pure knowledge of Him; for although His name may be left to Him, still He is stripped of His majesty as soon as He is mixed up with a multitude of others." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 420

the Scripture that says “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (**Romans 10:13**). Why couldn’t he find forgiveness? Because he wasn’t *really* calling upon the name of the LORD. He was calling upon a lord who shared his throne with the teachings of Buddha. He was calling upon a lord whose Scripture wasn’t any more true than his own experiences and feelings. This Jesus he was seeking was simply a god amongst other gods. Our God doesn’t share His throne with anyone or anything. **Isaiah 42:8** “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.”²⁰

Second, if you do not confess this is who God is—namely the Triune God—then you undo the Gospel. Throughout Church history, whenever the Trinity is denied, the Deity of Christ is denied. And if Jesus Christ is not truly God and truly man, He cannot save us from our sins. He said in **John 8:24** “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that *I am* he [Jehovah] you will die in your sins.”

Family worship is confessional

How do we apply this to family worship? It is of first importance that you teach your children theology. Theology is the study of God. Family worship must begin by confessing who God truly is. The most helpful method of teaching theology to children is in the form of catechisms. Don’t be afraid of that word. It’s a Biblical word *κατηχέω* *katēcheō* which means to teach, to instruct, to inform by word of mouth. Catechisms are a specific form of instruction which include a question and answer. Good catechism like the Shorter Catechism and the Heidelberg catechism provide a systematic teaching of sound doctrine. These catechisms provide a confessional truth of everything a Christian needs to know. They give define who God is; they provide the overarching story of Scripture, namely: creation, fall, redemption, glory; they provides us what God requires of us in the ten commandments; as well as how we are to pray in the

²⁰ Self-professing evangelicals today still struggle with this teaching. [State of Theology 2020](#): conflict between statement 2 & 6. Furthermore it is JW's who believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person but a force or a power. Compare statement 8 with <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-the-holy-spirit/>

Lord's prayer; what the sacraments mean; and how we are to repent and believe the gospel. In other words, they tell us what we ought to believe about God (doctrine), how we can commune with God (duty), and what God has done for us in Christ (delight). That's our **first point**: family worship is confessional.

II. Family Worship Is Affectional

What I mean *here* is that family worship must aim at *love* towards God. Yes family worship must start with truth, but truth is not enough. The devils know the truth about God, and they tremble at it (**James 2:19**), but they don't love Him. Children who know the truth but don't love God are no better than the devils.

The duty of love

Please look at v.5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." This is the goal of our existence. It is the chief end of man, it is the sum of all the law—to love the Lord our God. What does Moses mean here by *love*? The word means to desire, to breathe after, to long for. **Psalm 42:1** "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." What imagery! As a thirsty deer hunts down the life giving springs over hill and rock and mountain, he pants for it, nothing can deter him, nothing can stop him until he has it. He pants after the water. Loving the LORD is panting after Him, you must have Him, nothing else will do, nothing else will satisfy, all is rubbish as Paul says, compared to the all-surpassing worth of knowing and loving Christ Jesus my Lord.

The lesser to greater progression

Moses draws this out further, he says "...you shall love [Him] with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." This is a lesser to greater progression. *With all your heart* means with all your affections. God doesn't want

mere outward devotion, He wants our hearts to belong to Him. *With all your soul* is a greater progression meaning not just our hearts, but our minds, and our wills. That God's truth would delight our deepest intellectual cravings. That God's law would delight our very our wills such that it is our desire to follow Him, obey Him, walk with Him, commune with Him. Finally *With all your might* means that we would do this to the highest degree, most forcibly, most violently, with all our strength.²¹

King Josiah

That's how King Josiah's love for the Lord was described. When he became king, the nation of Judah was engrossed in idolatry and child sacrifice. He began to restore the temple, and the Book of the Law was discovered. It had been lost. When Josiah had it read, the words of the LORD struck him so deeply that immediately turned violently to the LORD. **2 Kings 23:24-25** says "Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that *he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book* that Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the Lord. Before him there was no king like him, *who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might*, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him."

Love to the LORD manifest itself in fidelity to His Word

King Josiah helps us to see the connection between v.5 and v.6. How does the sincere love to the LORD in v.5 respond? v.6 "And *these words* that I command you today shall be *on your heart*." King Josiah was utterly committed to God's Word—so much that he turn his whole kingdom upside down—and

²¹ This phraseology signifies that we are to have no higher love than the LORD. He is to be loved above our comfort, above our prosperity, above our entertainment, above all relationships, above even our selves. Matthew 10:37-39 "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

that demonstrated that he really loved the LORD with his heart, soul and might. Children, boys and girls, imagine you run into your friend Johnny, and you ask him: ‘Johnny, do you love your mom?’ And Johnny says ‘Yes I love my mom.’ And then you say ‘Johnny, do you do what your mom says, do you obey her word?’ And he says ‘Of course I don’t’ and he laughs. Would you believe that Johnny loves his mom? No. You see loving the Lord is not just *merely* feeling. It means you love what He says, you live off His Word as if its your very food. Because it is. Moses says in **Deuteronomy 32:46-47** “Take to heart all [these] words...For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live...”

Can we get our children to love the LORD?

So how do we apply this truth to family worship? How can we get our children to love the LORD? Beloved we can’t. This is the vital difference between our first point and this point. You can teach your children who God is. You can clear away all the weeds, all the theological heresies, and fertilize the soil with catechism, and give them the water of the Word, and the sunlight of family fellowship and love. You can plant the seed of truth. But you can’t cause it to grow. As we already heard Paul say in **1 Corinthians 3:7** “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but *only God who gives the growth.*” You are entirely dependent upon the LORD to create spiritual life and love towards Him in your child’s heart.

What’s the point then?

So then why am I telling you that our family worship must aim at loving the LORD if we are powerless to create this in our children? **First**, so you will pray for your children. The Word must **always** be mixed with prayer. This is what we have been showing on Sunday Evenings. Pastor Luke showed last Sunday night that we can't just speak the truth to our political leaders, but we must pray for them *so that* they could come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (**1 Timothy 2:1-5**). Two weeks ago we saw from **Ephesians 3:14-21**, that it is not

enough that we learn about the love of Christ, but we must pray that God would give us the strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of it. It is dangerous theological position and a sign of spiritual sickness if we think we just need truth. No beloved, we need the Spirit of God to blow upon the dead bones so they can live. The Word of God is never separated from prayer to God. The Apostle Paul alone prays or teaches on prayer 42 times in his 13 letters.²² He knew that preaching and teaching wasn't enough. Dear fathers and mothers, do you pray for your children? You can't cause them to love God. Are you praying to the LORD to create that in them?

The **second** reason why family worship must aim at loving the LORD even though you can't create this in your children, is *so that* you can properly teach them what God requires of them. You must tell them that the Lord requires that they love Him. This is the sum of the entire law. Being moral is *not the goal*. Being a contributor to society is *not the goal*. Being independent and self-sufficient is *not the goal*. In fact, if you teach these things to your children as the most important things, you are building a wall between them and God. Remember the story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15**?²³ At the end of the story, the elder brother—the moral brother—wouldn't come into the feast. Why? He was angry because he believed his moral record should have earned him a better place than his rebellious *but repentant* younger brother. His moralism preventing him from loving the father. As one theologian rightly said: "The main thing [standing] between you and God is not so much your sins; it's your damnable good works."²⁴

²² Source: <https://www.kevinhalloran.net/the-apostle-pauls-prayers-in-the-bible/> Accessed February 20, 2021

²³ Luke 15: 28-30 "But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

²⁴ John Gerstner Source: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/586778> Accessed February 20, 2021

The gospel made clear

Beloved don't you see that this helps make the gospel most clear to your children? The LORD requires something that from them that they can't give Him on their own. 1 **John 4:9-10** "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If you teach your children *merely* to be moral, they will not get the gospel. But if they hear that they must love the Lord more than father and mother, and more than even their own lives, then they will realize what a sinner they are. They will realize how selfish and self-centered and wretched they are. And they will be in the very position to call out on the Lord Jesus Christ to save them. Jesus said "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (**Mark 2:17**) That's our **second point**. Family worship is affectional. It must be aimed at loving the LORD above all things.

III. Family Worship Is Experiential

What I mean *here* is that family worship must be experienced in all of life with our children. In addition to teaching, we must teach our children how to experience the faith.

The nature of this command

Please look with me at v.7 "You shall teach them" Stop. **First**, notice the *corporate nature* of this command. *You shall teach them*. Yes we should have private worship with the Lord and nurture this in our children. But the clear command

here is to have worship *together*. So if anyone ask: “Where does the Bible command that we must engage in family worship?” It’s right here.²⁵

The manner of this command

Secondly, notice the *manner* in which we are to teach them: “You shall teach them *diligently* to your children” *Diligently*—the Hebrew word can either mean to sharpen a sword or pierce with a sword. I think the latter is better. Calvin says it like this: When we teach our children the Word, it has the power to “penetrate their minds, as if [we] should prick them with the point of a sword.”²⁶

The frequency of this command

Thirdly, notice how *often* we should pierce them with God’s Word. “...and [you] shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” How often do we need to teach them the Word? Always! Moses includes all the activities that we would experience from morning till evening. The truths that we teach our children must be lived out subjectively,²⁷ they must be experience not only with words,

²⁵ So serious did the Westminster Divines take this command that they created a “Directory for Family Worship” and in the preface they laid out the principles of a censure for those fathers who neglected to lead their family in worship: “And, to the end that these directions may not be rendered ineffectual and unprofitable among some, through the usual neglect of the very substance of the duty of Family-worship, the Assembly doth further require and appoint ministers and ruling elders to make diligent search and enquiry, in the congregations committed to their charge respectively, whether there be among them any family or families which use to neglect this necessary duty; and if any such family be found, the head of the family is to be first admonished privately to amend his fault; and, in case of his continuing therein, he is to be gravely and sadly reprovved by the session; after which reproof, if he be found still to neglect Family-worship, let him be, for his obstinacy in such an offense, suspended and debarred from the Lord’s supper, as being justly esteemed unworthy to communicate therein, till he amend.” Source <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/directory-for-family-worship/> Accessed February 20, 2021

²⁶ Calvin, pg. 366. That’s how **Hebrews 4:13** speaks of the Word “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

²⁷ Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies: A Manual For Christian Dissidents*, (New York, NY.: Sentinel, 2020), pg. 116

but with the wonders of the world. This is how Jesus often taught. He told His disciples in **Matthew 6:26** “*Look* at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” I imagine when Jesus said that he pointed at actual birds. He used a very ordinary moment to exalt His Father in Heaven and drawn the disciples into worship. That’s what Moses is talking about here. Don’t think those ordinary moments with your children aren’t filled with millions of opportunities to worship. When you walk through the supermarket, teach them to be in awe of the tortillas, and fried chicken, and soda pop, that God put all of it on earth all to feed us (**Psalm 104:14**). Or when you are in the park and you see a bunch of ants carrying off some leftover picnic food, you can point out how these ants have no leader, but God hardwired it in them to work together and store up their food in harvest time (**Proverbs 6:6**). What happens when you do this with your kids? Your teaching them how to think about the whole world, that everything is meant to draw our hearts closer to God. Recall the old hymn:

This is my Father's world:
 The birds their carols raise,
 The morning light, the lily white,
 Declare their Maker's praise.
 This is my Father's world:
 He shines in all that's fair;
 In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
 He speaks to me everywhere.²⁸

²⁸ Source: https://hymnary.org/text/this_is_my_fathers_world_and_to_my Accessed February 20, 2021. Job 12:7-10 “But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

The depth of this command

Fourth, consider how *deeply* we are to implant these things in our children. **v.8-9** “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” The Jews took these verses in a wooden literal sense. They would “...tie little boxes [or leather pouches called phylacteries] containing these verses on their arms and foreheads and fasten them on their doorposts.”²⁹ But Moses doesn’t mean this. When he commands us to bind God’s law on our hands, foreheads, doorposts, and gates, he means that we are to meditate on and memorize God’s Word and bring it everywhere we go. Dear congregation do you understand how valuable this is to helping your children get through life? One of our children is really struggling with terrible anxieties right now. And it’s pretty constant. He’s asking for help. So I wrote down on a card for him some memory prompts. He’s already memorized the Lord’s Prayer and Q.1 to the Heidelberg. And I told him, ‘Son, when these anxieties come upon, remind yourself of these truths. That you are not your own, but you belong body and soul, both in life and death to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all your sins.’ You see? We’ve armed him through family worship to be able to face the spiritual warfare that is certain to come upon him. We’ve bound these things to his hands and his forehead, so they are with him where-ever he goes.

Answering an objection

So let’s answer just one objection against family worship. I can imagine someone saying “Pastor Josh, don’t you realize the present crisis that exists in our nation today. We need to do something more decisive more subversive than mere family worship and catechism to change the course.” How do we answer? Do you know the most decisive and subversive thing you can do in this present crisis is catechize your children. This doesn’t mean we can’t or shouldn’t engage

²⁹ The Reformation Study Bible, pg. 263. Matthew 23:5 “They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.”

the culture in other ways. But don't you know what statist governments always attack first? The family. The family is a threat to state control,³⁰ precisely because it can counter the cultural catechism. Every culture has an orthodoxy. Christian catechism is inherently subversive to the culture's orthodoxy because it fights at the very root. This is what Jesus did. Next to His cross and resurrection, His greatest weapon against the darkness was His teaching. How many times did he say: "you have heard it said, *but I say to you...*?" In other words 'you have heard the culture say this...but I the LORD God say this.'³¹ That's what family worship achieves. 'Children you've heard the culture say this...but this is what the LORD says.' That's the greatest impact we can have.³²

Implementing Family Worship³³

So then how do you begin family worship? Start small. Three easy steps.

- 1) Read the Word of God.
- 2) Pray before the throne of God.
- 3) Sing to the glory of God.

First read the Word the God. Show them that the Word is the most exciting, most other-worldly book they can possibly encounter. Try to apply it. We've been walking through the Exodus account (we use the Kingstone Illustrated Bible) and my younger two boys are shocked at how often Israel keeps rebelling, and complaining against the Lord. I agree with them, and say: "Israel is a picture of us. How often do we complain against our Lord in the way He is leading us? This is why we need a true and better Moses,—the LORD Jesus Christ—one that will not only lead us into the promised land, but will pay

³⁰ Dreher, pg. 132

³¹ Jesus was crucified precisely because of His counter-catechism.

³² "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York, NY.: Delacorte Press, 1982), pg. xi

³³ Beeke, pg.17ff

our debt before God so we have access.” You see the Word always provides rich opportunities to point them to their need for Christ.

Second pray before the throne of God. Ask God to help you and them understand His Word. You can even use the Word to pray. ‘We thank you Lord that You are our Shepherd, that you make us lie down in green pastures and lead us besides still waters. Lead us now in paths of righteousness for your name’s sake.’

Third sing to the glory of God. I know this may be hard especially if you feel like you can’t carry a tune. But we live in the age of YouTube and Vimeo and you can easily find songs with lyrics that will help lead your family. Parents, especially fathers, if your children don’t see you singing and expressing your love to the Lord, how will they learn to love him? Singing was specifically designed by Him to express our love to Him.

As you get your feet under you, you can add more things especially memorizing Bible verses and catechism question. Talk to others in the assembly who have been doing this and they can help you with additional resources. Invite yourself over to another family’s house so you can learn how they do it.

The cross and family worship

How difficult is family worship? It’s impossibly hard. It’s filled with failures, with frustrations, and often with fights. It takes alertness, perseverance, time, and physical and emotional energy.³⁴ But the cost of family worship comes no where near the cost of our Redemption. The LORD Jesus Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Jesus gave everything, held back nothing, so that we could worship with His family in Heaven forever. How could we fail to bring our families to His throne? How can we not take the greatest pains so that they may come to know the LORD?

Some of you already have grown children and can only see your failures here. Loved ones, if you belong to Christ, those failures were transferred to His

³⁴ Ryken, pg. 82

account. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgression from us. Have honest conversations about your adult children confessing your sins to them and asking for their forgiveness. If you have grandchildren, you can pour into them. My family experienced salvation because of a faithful great-grandmother. Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:5** “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” Grandparents can have an immeasurable impact.

Some of you have no children, so you may think this message is irrelevant. If there’s two of you—good news—it only takes two for family worship. If you are single without children, then remember the the children in this assembly are also part of your family by covenant. Pray for them, seek ways to invest into them, ask parents how you can help.

Children, when King David’s son Absalom died as a wicked man, King David wept and wept and wept for him. David was not a perfect father, but he taught his household about the Lord. Absalom rejected it. David wished he could have traded places with him so he could spare his son. Children, remember how much your salvation means to your parents. Listen to their instruction, nobody on planet earth loves them more than you.

Finally, to those parents who still have children in the house, and especially your fathers. Don’t neglect this command for family worship. Can you imagine your children asking you on the Day of Judgment: ‘Why didn’t you teach us about the LORD, why didn’t you show us compassion and pity, that now we have to suffer this misery? Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents that they did not teach us the things of God.³⁵’ Now it’s true that we don’t have the power to convert our children. That is true. Only the Spirit can cause the new birth. But we are responsible to raise our children in the fear and nurture of the LORD. May He give us grace to do so.

³⁵ Ryken, pg. 79