

THE BELIEVING HOME – A CENTRE FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



BY DON STANTON

IF WE explore the Biblical roots of the Faith, we will discover principles and practices that have long been neglected.

In the Old Testament we see it was God's intention for every family in Israel to be a centre for spiritual growth. Every father was to be the spiritual authority in the home, and he was to train up his family in the ways of YHWH. He was to take care of the family's spiritual well-being as well as its basic education and sustenance.

The present Christian practice is send children to secular schools for "secular" education, and to Sunday School for "religious" instruction. And the majority of Christian fathers renege on their spiritual responsibility as head of the home. As a result, they, and their families forfeit much spiritual blessing.

"Time" of course is a main culprit. Although we have time for most other things, we don't have much time for the family. Fathers! Do you neglect the spiritual mandate from the LORD for the personal training of your young?

Handing over a child to someone else for instruction is not the answer. Our children need to hear God's instructions from their PARENTS' mouths. (And of course, parents should be Godly role models). While they are young, children will listen to their parents. The very fact that "Dad said it," is enough for most children.

Today, homes everywhere are breaking up, and even many Christian children are in rebellion. The pressures and influences from outside are very powerful, and unless our children are established in the Faith at an early age, they are soon going to be play toys in the hands of Satan.

If you think that Sunday School and "the Pastor" are going to fulfil your family's spiritual requirements, you may be very disappointed. Already it may be too late! Father, it is YOUR responsibility. The Scriptures say:

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

Hear the words of *The Shema* - one of the most well-known passages of the Old Testament:

“Hear O Israel. YHWH our God, YHWH is one ... these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be in your heart; you shall impress them upon your children. Speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

These words make it abundantly clear that the home must be the centre of spiritual learning.

Look also at Solomon’s instructions in Proverbs 4:1-5:

“Sons! Listen to the instruction of a **father**, and give attention to gain understanding; for I have given you sound teaching. Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son *in my father’s house, still* tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, **he taught me** and said to me, ‘Lay hold of my words with all your heart. Keep my commandments and live! Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth!’”

For a child, the real world is the home. The “church” or Sunday School to many is like a theatre, a place you go to once a week, and listen to instructions from comparative strangers. Preachers often shout or speak above the heads of children, and in a language that is “separated” from real life.

(This observation is speaking in general. It is not criticizing churches that are true spiritual homes, and where children are taught the Scriptures clearly.)

And there are many homes where children receive no spiritual instruction at all; so the Sunday School, Assembly, or Children’s Bible Club may be the only place where they can receive spiritual teaching.

The Church is very important indeed - it is an expression of the Body of the Messiah. But it will be more healthy and mature, when it is composed of healthy, mature, and spiritually-instructed families. Preachers have to minister to all types - people who are at various spiritual levels, and at different ages. So they are limited as to what they are able to teach, and for how long they can teach. These days, most church members can’t endure more than a 20-minute “message”; or 30 minutes if the sermon has more jokes in it.

(In one church, I was asked to preach not longer than 7 minutes. But that church was in the process of gradually conditioning the people to receive messages. Until shortly before that time, they had no messages at all. It was simply ritual.)

Many people “turn off” after 5 or 10 minutes because they have never learned to concentrate on spiritual exposition. And that’s more reason why we need to teach young ones how to concentrate at home.

TRAINING IN THE HOME

In the home, the father must teach the family HOW to read the Scriptures, and then he should impress Scriptural principles upon the young ones. He needs to train them in such a way that they are completely convinced, and learn to absolutely concur

with the Scriptures. They must be taught to love the Word, and they must know **why** they believe the Scriptures.

Parents need to set examples for their children, and display the Scriptural roles of husband and wife.

The mother has an important role in teaching also, as she usually spends more time with the children.

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” (Proverbs 1:8)

But it will be a wise woman who deeply respects her husband, and who teaches her children to honour their father as the head of the home.

And it will be a wise man that honors and upholds his wife, in front of the children, as an excellent wife. (See Proverbs 31:10-31)

In a home where the father is not saved, or where he is not very spiritual, the wife, without nagging him, should let him know that God’s intention for the father is to be the spiritual head of the home. Many men have never had that thought cross their minds. The wife should gently encourage her husband to read the Scriptures to the family, and to learn to pray with them.

Here church leaders can play an important role, by teaching the principles about spiritual authority in the home, and how to teach the Word to build up the family in the faith. They should be keen to guide the family in their desire to become a centre for spiritual growth.

A WEEKLY FAMILY EVENING

We can learn an important lesson by looking at the age-long Jewish practice of the *Shabbat Erev* meal – that is, the Sabbath Eve meal. (In the Scriptures, the Sabbath begins at sunset at the end of the 6th day.)

The eve of Shabbat was different from the other evenings of the week; it was the beginning of their day of rest. (It was a bit like in the Western world where most workers look forward to Friday night – and the beginning of their weekend off.)

Spiritually-minded Jews loved Shabbat, and their custom was for the family to gather for a **Shabbat meal** on Friday evening where they would have their own special, family evening - a time of worship, singing, reading the Torah, memorizing scriptures, praying, and reaffirming their faith and Biblical values.

The meal, which was the best of the week, was prepared before the Sabbath began. On the table there would be two loaves of bread representing God’s blessing, both spiritual and temporal. There were also two glasses of the fruit of the vine which represented the joy of the LORD, and the joy of life that He gives.

During the evening the Father would express his love and deep appreciation of his wife, and honour her as the excellent wife of Proverbs 31. And then he would bless his sons, and his daughters, one by one, reciting the blessing of Numbers 6:24-27.

Praying for their blessing, and placing the Name of Yahweh upon the children, gave them an assurance that they belonged to the faith of the family, and that their parents were always concerned for them.

The whole evening was leisurely – it was prime time for the family and the LORD! And this regular practice helped greatly in **uniting the family**.

LET US SEEK TO MAKE OUR HOME A SPIRITUAL CENTRE

To conclude: Every believing family should seek to be a centre of spiritual growth. The father is to be spiritual head of the household, and the children are to be brought up in the instruction of the LORD.

We do not have to imitate the Jewish custom, but a regular fellowship time can bring much blessing to Christian families, and greatly help them to be united, and to grow up in the ways of the Heavenly Father.

None of this is to be bondage, except in the sense that we are the slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:16). This may seem quite “heavy” to Christians who want to walk casually and lightly with their God. But should it not be our burning desire to do God’s will?

“I delight to do Your will, O My God; Your Torah (instruction) is within My heart.” (Psalm 40:8)

“Children, obey your parents ... FATHERS, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Master.” (Ephesians 6:1, 4)