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Child-rearing: Faith and Works in the Promises of God

(Eph 2:8-10, selected passages)

Introduction (Eph 2:8-10) – There are many duties for parents who seek to raise their children in the Lord. The responsibility is huge. But, just as is true with every aspect of our obedience as Christians, we must always remember where we begin. We are saved by grace through faith and not by any works. Even that faith is a gift of God. There is no duty, no merit, no works involved. But this kind of faith produces good works, the kind that glorifies God, and the kind that brings blessing to thousands of generations.

Faith in Faithfulness (Heb 11:1, 6, 11) – We are not saved because we have faith in faith, but because of the object of our faith. When that object is Jesus Christ, and the faithfulness of the Son of God, God rewards. This kind of faith sees what cannot be seen and believes what cannot be imagined. Sarah believed God “...because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Faith is the natural response to the perceived faithfulness of God. We see or hear God’s promises, our eyes are opened to His grace and faithfulness, and we believe God.

What Did He Say? – The Word of God is full of promises to covenant homes.

Psalms 102:25-28, 103:15-18 – God promises that our children will be established with Him (102:28, 103:17) and this truth is considered much greater than the work of creation or any work of man.

Deut 5:9-10, 7:9 – God promises to show His mercy to thousands of generations.

Ezek 37:24-26 – In the days of the Messiah, God promises to bless us, our children, and our grandchildren, forever.

Luke 1:48-50 – Mary quotes this as the work of God in Christ.

Acts 2:37-39 – Peter applies these covenant promises at Pentecost, and this gospel goes out to the whole world.

Just Believe? – The question of the relationship between believing these promises (faith) and our duties as parents (works) is the age old question of faith and works. Martin Luther once said that a sinner trying to believe the gospel was like a drunk man on a horse; falling off one side (legalism), he gets back on the horse and then falls off the other side (licentiousness). He has a terrible time staying up on top of the horse. It is like that when it comes to faith and works, and it is like that when it comes to believing the covenant promises of God for our children and recognizing our duties as parents.

Slip #One: Faith Plus Works (Gal 2:14-21) – According to Paul, justification is by faith alone and not by the works of the law. The sin tempting the Galatians was to fall into the trap of believing that they had to keep the works of the law either for their salvation or for their sanctification (Gal 3:1-3). This was foolishness.

Slip #Two: Faith Without Works (James 2:14-24) – According to James, even the demons have a kind of faith, but that faith is a faith without works, and is dead. Evangelical faith is not a mere intellectual assent to certain propositions, but an attitude of the whole man by which his whole life is entrusted to Christ – and this produces a change in the way the man lives.

The Solution (Gal 5:6) – “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*” That’s the phrase to rest on – “*faith working through love,*” or simply “*faith working...*” The faith that Paul is commending is a faith that receives the Spirit who gives men power to lead a holy life. That is the faith that saves, and that is the faith that believes the promises of God – even for the children and grandchildren and generations yet to be born.

Faith Without Presumption/Faith Without Fear – The Westminster Confession of Faith says the “*principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.*” Faith does not somehow evaporate, like the water you were baptized with, at which time you now need to find some other way to advance the works of sanctification. Faith is an ongoing trait of the believer – faith in the faithfulness of God who is “*at work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.*”

For the parent, this means that child-rearing, like all aspects of Christian duties, flows from faith. We must not do our duty in order to earn our way into the promises. The promises are freely given to all parents who believe them. And the mark of those who believe them with evangelical faith are those who are bearing the fruit of that faith.

This kind of faith never presumes upon God as though there were no conditions for keeping covenant with God. It does believe that God gives the grace to keep the conditions, and looks to God, to the power of the Spirit, to the means of grace in the Word and in the sacraments, for the ability and desire to do so.

This kind of faith never fears, because “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...*” (1 John 4:18). It looks to the object of that faith, to Jesus Christ, and sees His perfect faithfulness, and rests there.

When your kids are doing well – thank God for His grace; it is manifest before you.

When your kids are not doing well – turn to God first and plead His covenant promises. Strengthened by faith, walk again in the

good works (of child-rearing) that God has prepared for you.

When you are not doing well – confess, repent, seek restitution and renewal in His gracious promises – and all by and because of grace – through faith.

Dave Hatcher – April 29, 2007