

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

God's design from the beginning was to have a family of created beings, redeemed by him. God the Father chose in eternity past all who would be in that family, a group that John the Apostle saw in the Revelation as a number that no man could count. A mass of people.

St. Augustine said, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist." Having left the first parents to the freedom of their own will (*Shorter Catechism*, Q13), they chose to rebel against God and lost the very freedom endowed and became slaves to sin. But God had a plan and that plan could not be thwarted for God the Son was born to die—to ransom the lost sheep and bring them back to the fold; we will sing the praises of the slain and risen Lamb of God for all eternity.

God has grandchildren and great grands. When you and I are born again, we are born into a family a family of people. As the Hymn The Church's One Foundation says,

The Church's one foundation Is Jesus Christ her Lord, She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her And for her life He died. Elect from every nation, Yet one o'er all the earth; Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth; One holy Name she blesses, Partakes one holy food, And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

Luke writes in Acts 17 that God controls the times and season in which we were born; He knew our parents and their parents; He had a plan that involved their personalities, their genetics, their DNA, their likes and dislikes that would strongly affect us in many ways to make us what we are today. None of us are cosmic accidents and are designed by God to do and be what He has called us to do and be. This is our vocation, a term from the Latin *voco* "I call." Our task planned for us is a calling from God and designed by Him for His own glory in us and through us.

Adam and Eve were given the Great Commission in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

God told Adam and Eve that they were to have dominion over all things. Their marriage was to be the means by which God would build culture and hence subdue the creation. Marriage is a **federal** relationship. "Federal" is a word from the Latin *foedus*, meaning "covenant." A **covenant** "is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses."¹ The use of the term federal, like much of our classical vocabulary has lost its meaning. Because of the prevalent understanding of federal associated with the "federal government", we often think that anything federal is large and intrusive.

¹ Douglas Wilson, *Federal Husband*, (Moscow: Canon, 1999). 12.

By describing marriage as federal, we simply mean that marriage is ordered with obligations by both man and woman to God and each other, with stipulations for blessing and curse; for obedience and disobedience by breaking the terms of the covenant.

The goal therefore in our marriage covenant with God is to bring prosperity to our culture through raising covenant-faithful children, as our culture's covenant-breaking has brought God's justice and curse. In his book *Reforming Marriage*, Doug Wilson observes, "God's relationship to us through Christ is covenantal—it is the New Covenant—and our marriages are a picture of that truth."² Further, he says, "Our triune God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, and he has chosen marriage as one of the best instruments through which fallen man may glorify Him."³ Wilson writes that every marriage is a pattern of the first marriage. Every marriage therefore is a glimpse of the glory of God; as God is Trinity in covenant love, marriages therefore reflect that social image in the earth. The main purpose for marriage is raising "Godly seed" (Malachi 2.13ff). This Godly seed is the covenant children that further bring the kingdom of God to fullness as the church expands in the world. Believers' children are therefore their inheritance in the earth and the promise of cultural change and the expansion of righteousness in the earth. Thus, the faithful procreation of Christian children is the normal means for the progress of the Gospel, as Peter said in Acts 2.39, "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

From the Christian perspective, the covenantal obligation of **traditioning**, or the mandate for parents to pass onto their children their faith and a self-understanding of what God expects of them. This is exemplified in Deuteronomy 6.4-9,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and 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. 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.

This is the basis of the reformed and presbyterian practice of catechizing or training our children what they are to believe; if we don't indoctrinate them someone else will.

The Psalmist warns us and exhorts us today:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

The primary form of evangelism in Scripture is the family. This is our greatest sphere of influence. God desires to have dominion over the culture through the propagation of covenant families who know their God and who desire to obey God in all areas of life.

The secondary form of evangelism is bringing in outsiders to the family, that is, people who have no connection. To the church. Jesus told us to go and get them as well, but not at the expense of the "little ones" among us. To belabor a point, we are all born again into what the Bible calls the "Body of Christ" that is, into the church. It is not just about "Jesus and Me." The primary emphasis in Scripture is corporate, not individual. Your gifts and talents that God has given you are not for yourself, but for others who need you in the Body of Christ, the Church. We are all baptized into one Body and are members of one Church. When we witness baptisms, we all take vows that we would help the little ones; to set godly examples, lest their faith be scandalized and they grow up to leave the church never to return.

² Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, (Moscow: Canon, 1995). 14.

³ Ibid.

The Psalmist calls us,

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

It is our duty to give our faith to our little ones. Charles Spurgeon said that every family is a small church and every father its pastor. But it is not simply the family's obligation, it is the church's obligation to help spiritually raise these little ones into strong believers, secure in their Christian identity and their Christian heritage. Why?

that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

Joshua— after leading the people of Israel to the promised Land of Canaan— warns them (Joshua 24):

Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD; for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

It is my prayer that in such times of economic uncertainty and such insecurity of the future in this nation that we will look to Jehovah for our strength and for the strength of our families. We cannot trust the devices and schemes of evil men whether on the street, county council, the state house of the white house. We can however trust the God that has seen fit that each of us should be here today, hearing and confessing our faith anew— meeting with each other and our God. Let us not grow weary in the task he has set for us as a local body of believers; His providential hand has been with this church for almost 250 years and we here are witnesses to his faithfulness even today. Let us not forget our God to serve and bow down to the idols of the culture and the spirit of the age. God has blessed us with little ones— what will their world look like in 10 years? God promises blessing for our obedience and promises discipline for our disobedience. Let us heed the words of Joshua: “. . . choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served or the gods in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

May we respond as they did: “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

While Jehovah did not take our ancestors from Egypt, he did bring the Gospel to the Saxons, the Celts, the Scots, the Britans and the Danes; the Romans and the Spanish. He did see to it that our forefathers were converted and they sought to abandon the futile idols they once worshipped. Many of us grew up in Christian homes and some of us had godly examples to follow—may their faith and labor not be in vain.

The Pilgrims in the Mayflower Compact wrote that the purpose of the new world was to build the Kingdom of God and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to whomever God would call. May it be so even in our time and may not forget *the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done* and teach them to our children, “. . . that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments . . .”

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY GHOST, AMEN.