

Sunday, May 5, 2024

Handout - Lesson #10

Pastoral Theology: Blessings to the Parents

Chapter 4 of *Covenantal Baptism*

- Summary

- Helopoulos - “Covenantal baptism serves as a wonderful blessing for Christian parents. The Lord has given us good gifts through not only our children but also this sacrament that is to mark them. It provides not only hope but confidence. It encourages us to be faithful in our parenting even as it demands that we rest. Our God has declared that his promises are not only for us but for our children; let’s live, pray, and believe this. He is worthy of our trust.”

- Vows for Parents¹

1. Do you acknowledge your child’s need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you claim God’s covenant promises in (his/her) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his/her) salvation, as you do for your own?
3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him/her), that you will teach (him/her) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God’s appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

- What is a vow?

- A vow is a promise made to God.
- WCF 22.5 - A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness.²

¹ The Book of Church Order, 56-5.

² Num. 30:2; Isa. 19:21; Eccl. 5:4-6; Ps. 61:8; Ps. 66:13-14.

- WCF 22.6 - It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want, whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties; or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto.³
- Why do parents take vows when their children are baptized?
 - Because God's covenant promises to us are accompanied by covenant responsibilities.
 - As a sacrament, baptism is a holy sign and seal of the covenant of grace. During the administration of baptism, parents hear God's covenant promises: "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. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:31). After hearing God's covenant promises, the parents reply with vows that are rooted in faith.
 - **The Blessing of Remembering Our Children's Need**
 - Vow #1 - Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
 - Our children have the greatest of all needs. Our children's greatest need is for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit.
 - **The Blessing of Faith and Rest**
 - Vow #2 - Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his/her) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his/her) salvation, as you do for your own?
 - Our children have the greatest of all needs, but they are not without hope. Our hope is in our faithful, covenant-keeping God. Our children belong to him. His covenant promises are for them. So, we look in faith to God and to his covenant promises. We look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for our children's salvation.

³ Ps. 50:14; Ps. 76:11; Ps. 116:14; Deut. 23:21-23; Gen. 28:20-22; 1 Sam. 1:11; Ps. 66:13-14; Psa. 132:2-5.

Baptism reminds us that our hope is in God's promise and in his work. What a blessing!

- **The Blessing of Labor**

- Vow #3 - Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him/her), that you will teach (him/her) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?
- Helopoulos - "As we rely upon God's grace, we also endeavor and strive with and for our children's souls.... All our parenting is done in the hope that they will know, trust, and delight in the Lord whom we love.... Evangelism is a way of life for Christian parents. We continually direct our children to the goodness of God and the covenant promises he has made to us in Christ Jesus and always call our children not to bank upon the fact that their parents are Christians but to realized that they must place their own personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."
- In Practice:
 - **Remind Your Covenant Children of Their Baptism**
 - Helopoulos - "We have in our hands one of the greatest means for evangelism."
 - What could it look like to remind our children of their baptism?
 - **Call Your Covenant Children to Repentance and Faith**
 - *First Catechism:*
 - Question: What does baptism call you to be?
 - Answer: A true follower of Jesus.
 - **Pray with and for Your Covenant Children**
 - Helopoulos - "If we knew what we accomplish for the sake of the kingdom where we are on our knees, we would be tempted to never rise."
 - **Practice Family Worship in Your Home**

- Helopoulos - “Your Christian home is to be a little church - one that is centered upon Christ and therefore the worship of Christ. The regular routine of gathering around the Word, praying together, and daring to sing with one another shines as one of the greatest blessings of being brought up as a covenant child in a covenant home.”
- What did family worship look like in your home growing up?

- Catechize Your Children

- Helopoulos - “The historic spiritual discipline of catechizing serves as one of the most proven, helpful, and easy ways to accomplish this goal in the lives of our children.”
- What catechetical resources have you found helpful? What might it look like to catechize our children?

- Bring Them Week In and Week Out to Corporate Worship

- Helopoulos - “While it is not always easy to do so, bringing our children to corporate worship is central to Christian parenting. Why? Because corporate worship is the most important part of the life that the covenant community shares together - and children are part of this covenant community.... The more we place them in the way of the means of grace, the better opportunity their souls have to encounter the God of grace.”

- Talk Often of Christ and the Things of Christ

- Deuteronomy 6:7 - “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.”

- The Blessing of Hope

- Helopoulos - “Above all, continue to hope. Not one of our covenant children is too far gone for God’s grace to be able to reach him or her.... No matter how great her sin, no matter how hard his heart.... our Lord can work the miracle of conversion for a covenant child in the blink of an eye. So keep praying with hope. He is a covenant-keeping God. ‘O Father, this was one of the children of the covenant community. Lord, this child is marked by baptism. Save this child, I pray! Make my child your child. I know that you love me and hear my prayers, so I will keep praying and hoping and trusting.’”