

Producing Generational Loyalty to God

*The Primary Place of Family
Training*

“Whereas in 1820 Protestants had thought about children’s religious experiences primarily in terms of family and church, by 1880 it was impossible to conceive of them without reference to the Sunday school. During the nineteenth century, this new institution became the primary locale – outside of the family – for religious indoctrination of Protestant youth. In the annals of church history the saga of Sunday school was unique, involving...the creation of a new institution to fulfill functions previous entrusted to parents and pastors...” – Ann Boylan

“It is obvious that youth ministry in America has not produced a generation of young people who are passionate about the church...the number of full time youth pastors has grown dramatically and a plethora of magazines, music, and ideas aimed at youth have been birthed along the way. Meanwhile...the numbers of young people won to Christ dropped at about as fast a rate.” – Alvin Reid

“Sunday school is actually more detrimental to the spiritual and moral health of our children” than keeping them out. – Ken Ham and Britt Beemer

Proverbs 4:1-5 “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.”

4 Arguments for the Primary Place of Family Training

1. Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty
2. Argument from OT Israel
3. Argument from NT Church
4. Argument from Church History

Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty

- Divine institutions are “absolute social structures instituted by God for the entire human race—believers and unbelievers alike.” – Charles Clough
- Sphere sovereignty highlights the fact that each God-created social sphere, whether marriage, family, government or church, has a God designated sovereign responsible for that sphere.

Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty

“All those in the city who happen to be older than ten they will send out to the country; and taking over their children, they will rear them-far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents-in their own manners and laws that are such as we described before. And, with the city and the regime of which we were speaking thus established most quickly and easily, it will itself be happy and most profit the nation in which it comes to be.” - Plato

Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty

“If there are laws for adult life, there should be laws for childhood, which teach obedience to the others; and just as the reason of each man is not left to be the sole judge of his duties, so too *the education of children should not be left to their fathers’ capacities and prejudices*, especially since it is even more important to the state than to their fathers...*the state remains while the family is dissolved.*” - Rousseau

Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty

“President Obama’s Justice Department...argued” in 2010 that a German family who immigrated to the United States in order to home school their children “should be denied asylum based on their contention that governments may legitimately use its authority to force parents to send their kids to government-sanctioned schools.”

Argument from OT Israel

- Abraham in Gen 18:17-19
- Jacob in Gen 35:1-12
- Israel in Exod 12:21-28
- Moses in Deut 6:1-15
- Asaph in Ps 78:1-8
- Elijah in Mal 4:4-6

Argument from NT Church

- Fathers and Children in Eph 6:4
- A Believing Mother Only in 1 Cor 7:14
- Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:44
- Sosthenes and his household comparing 1 Cor 1:2 with Acts 18:17?
- Crispus and his household in Acts 18:8
- The Philippian jailer and his household in Acts 16:31-34

Argument from Church History

- John Huss' *Bohemia*
- Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*
- Westminster Shorter Catechism

Argument from Church History

“Promising also unto our best ability to teach our children and servants the knowledge of God and of his will that they may serve him also.” – First settlers of Salem (1636)

Argument from Church History

“The husband must be the principal teacher of the family, he must instruct them, examine them, and rule them about manners of God.” – Richard Baxter

Argument from Church History

“Masters of the family must go before their households in the things of God. As such, they must keep up the family doctrine, family worship and family discipline.” –
Matthew Henry

Argument from Church History

“To all our Ministers and Members: Take particular care about our visiting families and press family and secret worship” –
Synod of Philadelphia (1733)

Argument from Church History

“We must for ever despair of seeing a primitive spirit of piety revived in the world until we are so happy to see a revival of family religion.” – George Whitfield

Argument from Church History

“Family education and order are some of the chief means of grace, if these fail in the home all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.” – Jonathan Edwards

Argument from Church History

“Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty: all other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. The head of the house is the one to lead the devotions, but if he be absent, or seriously ill, or an unbeliever, then the wife would take his place. Under no circumstances should family worship be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family, then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer....It is then that the little ones will receive their first impressions and form their initial conceptions of the Lord God.” – A.W. Pink

Argument from Church History

“I suspect we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious Gospel. They see far more of these things than we suppose. Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.” – J.C.Ryle

Argument from Church History

“I know not how a minister can employ his time, studies, and pen better (next to the conviction and conversion of particular souls), than in pressing upon householders a care of the souls under their charge. This hath a direct tendency to public reformation. Religion begins in individuals and passeth on to relatives, and lesser spheres of relationship make up greater: churches and commonwealths consist of families.” – Rev Oliver Heywood

Argument from Church History

“My great objection to Sunday schools is that I am afraid they will, in the end, destroy all family religion. Whatever has tendency to do this, I consider it as my duty to guard you against.” – Thomas Burns (1798)

Advantages of Emphasizing Family Training

1. Exposes children to more time in the word
2. Maximizes capitalization of natural life setting
3. Begins a theological conversation in the home
4. Generates close, open fellowship between parents and children
5. Gives the children a model for training their children when they become parents

Things the Church can do to Help

1. Remind fathers of their jurisdiction in the home and their God-given responsibility to train their children
2. Develop materials that specifically help fathers train their children in the home
3. Train the fathers in how to use the material by modeling
4. Encourage the fathers
5. Continue to train by teaching Bible-content rich lessons

Conclusions

1. Argument from Divine Institutions/Spheres of Sovereignty
2. Argument from OT Israel
3. Argument from NT Church
4. Argument from Church History
5. Advantages