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2 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Gheens Family

4 EDITORIAL

The Long Journey Back Home

FEATURED ARTICLES

Biblical and Theological Foundations for Family Ministry

10 JAMES M. HAMILTON, JR.

That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord

18 ROBERT L. PLUMMER

Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord

28 ANDY STIRRUP

From Whom Every Family in Heaven and on Earth is Named

36 BRYAN NELSON WITH TIMOTHY PAUL JONES

The Problem and the Promise of Family Ministry

REGULAR FEATURES

46 RESEARCH BRIEFS

Andrew Parker and Brandon Shields

48 MEDICAL ISSUES IN FAMILY MINISTRY:

When Does Life End?

William Cutrer

52 JFM FORUM:

Connecting Church and Home Conference 2010

Lauren Foster

58 BOOK REVIEWS

66 EQUIPPING THE GENERATIONS:

Learning to Listen

Jay Strother

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Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord

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“It’s Sunday Schools!” he told me. “They’ve destroyed the faith of children!” Such was the assertion made to me by a father in San Antonio. Over a plate of Italian food, this man proceeded to offer a brief historical sketch of what he saw as the systematic removal of parental responsibility for the discipleship of children. This happened, he believed, because churches have institutionalized children’s programming.

To be sure, this well-meaning man *did* make some good points about the impotence of many men in the spiritual leadership of their households. At the same time, is church-based children’s programming really to blame for this impotency? And is the abolition of Sunday School really the answer? The man’s analysis seemed, at best, like an extreme and reactionary response to a problem that is much broader than a congregation’s Sunday School or children’s programs.

Since that conversation several years ago, I have been pleased to see the publication of many more resources devoted to a thoughtful discussion of the role of families and churches in the Christian nurture of children. This chapter is part of that ongoing conversation. My purpose is to investigate the New Testament and other writings from the first three centuries of Christian faith, asking the question, “How, during this time period, did discipleship occur in the context of Christian families—or did it? What were the expectations for Christian training in the household? And how did the community of faith partner with believing households?”

FAMILY RELATIONS IN THE BIBLICAL METANARRATIVE

The inspired authors of the New Testament wrote within the framework of a foundational story—a “metanarrative”—that they assumed on the basis of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. It is possible to summarize the major movements of this metanarrative under four headings: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. To understand the perspective of the earliest Christians on parent-child relations, let’s first look together at what early Christians—not only

the New Testament authors but also the ante-Nicene fathers, from the first three centuries of Christianity—assumed about families in light of the four movements of this divine metanarrative.

Creation

Early Christian writers consistently assumed that God created the entire world good and that family relationships are intrinsic to that creational order (see, for example, 1 Tim 2:13-15).¹ Unless they possess the rare supernatural gift of singleness, men and women are expected to marry (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:2-7). Except for the believer's loyalty to God, the marriage relationship is to be unrivaled in intimacy and mutual commitment (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5-6; Eph 5:31). Fundamental to this expectation within the created order is the responsibility of parents to bear and to care for children—feeding them, clothing them, disciplining them, instructing them, and ultimately blessing them as they leave to form their own families (Isa 49:15; Matt 7:9-11; Gal 4:1-2; 2 Cor 12:14; 1 Tim 5:8-14). Adult children live with an obligation to care for ill or aging parents (1 Tim 5:4).

So prevalent were these assumptions in early Christianity that Christian writers repeatedly appealed to these tangible realities as analogies for spiritual matters (see, for example, Matt 7:11; 1 Thess 2:7, 11-12; 1 Tim 1:2; Philem 1:10). In his teachings, Jesus assumed this creation-based reality of family. For example, in Matthew 7:11, Jesus declared, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Notice how, even in a world stained by sin, Jesus assumed a benevolent parental attitude towards children—an attitude that seems to be rooted in creational structures. Similarly, early Christian writers assumed the universal obligation of children to obey even while admitting the undisputed reality of their disobedience (see, for example, Heb 12:5-11).

Fall

Early Christian writers also consistently affirmed the brokenness of the present world order. Due to the rebellion of our first parents, all creation groans beneath the weight of sin (Gen 3:1-24; Rom 8:20-22). Sometimes,

people talk about coming from "dysfunctional families." The reality is that, because of sin, we are all "dysfunctional" at the deepest level. Disharmony in family relationships is a sign of our fallenness. Children are exasperating and disobedient (Mark 13:12; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Tim 3:2). Parents are harsh, neglectful, even evil (Isa 49:15; Col 3:21; 1 Tim 5:8)—all because our world is broken.

Because of the brokenness of our world, family members do not do naturally what they ought to do. Members of Christian families must be instructed and trained in their obligations to one another. Husbands and wives must be reminded to love their spouses and children in Christ-honoring ways (Eph 5:22-33; Titus 2:4). In a world untainted by sin, such obligations would have been natural and spontaneous; now, such God-honoring behavior is impossible apart from the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Even born-again believers must be renewed daily through the application of God's Word to their hearts by the Holy Spirit. A sixteenth-century pastor named Martin Luther had this to say about the selfish tendency of a fallen man when he considers his familial duties:

Our natural reason . . . takes a look at married life . . . and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? [Woe, woe] upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise."

Luther then showed how a Christian might look at the same mundane tasks of family life through the eyes of faith:

What then does Christian faith say to this? It

opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, “O God, because I am certain that you have created me as a man and have from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with your perfect pleasure. I confess to you that I am not worthy to rock the little baby or to wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving your creature and your most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised! Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in your sight.”²

Family life exposes our own sinful tendencies and forces us to deal with the sins of people around us. As a result, family life can result not only in great joy but also in great frustration (see 1 Cor 7:28).

Yes, children *are* a wonderful blessing from the Lord! (Ps 127:3-5). Yet anyone who has spent any time with children must also agree that these blessings can sometimes be quite exasperating. “Every child is sometimes infuriating,” C. S. Lewis observed, “[and] most children are not infrequently odious.”³ Sociological studies report that many men find the addition of small children to the household to be a disheartening relational and emotional challenge. One researcher discovered that some of the angriest people in society were parents with small children.⁴ It is helpful to acknowledge openly these effects of the Fall, particularly in the context of the community of faith. Otherwise, Christian parents may find themselves struggling silently in daily failure and frustration, unwilling to seek help and unable to see their struggles in light of God’s grace and the ultimate promise of a new creation.

Redemption

The inspired authors of the New Testament present

the Gospel of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promise to establish a new covenant with his people, to write his truth on their hearts, and to place his Spirit within them (Jer 31:31; Ezek 36:24-27; Luke 22:20). On the cross, Jesus endured God’s judgment for the sins of humanity; through his resurrection, Jesus initiated God’s new creation. Part of his ongoing restoration of the created order includes the restoration of proper relationships between parents and children. Regarding John the Baptist, Luke reported that the herald of the new covenant would “go before [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Luke 1:17).

By faith, all redeemed persons—Jews and Gentiles alike—become members of God’s family and heirs of the promises made to Abraham (Gal 3:29). As children of Abraham through faith, early Christians embraced the Old Testament Scriptures as their Bible (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:16). They viewed passages in the Old Testament about the importance of parents passing on spiritual truth to their children (Gen 18:19; Deut 6:4-9; 32:46) as authoritative divine instruction. The “newness” of the new covenant was found in the Messiah’s consummated work of salvation and in the regenerative work in the Spirit—not in any radical alterations in parent-child relationships.

Consummation

Biological and adoptive family relations, while vitally important in this life, are not eternal. Jesus made it clear that, in the new heavens and earth, marriages will no longer mark our existence; all believers will be “like the angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30). If our children stand beside us in eternity, it will not be as our children but as our blood-redeemed brothers and sisters (Rev 7:9-12). Even as parents rightly pour out their lives in caring for their children, they must realize that what matters eternally is that their children know and love the Lord. The category of biological lineage or legal progeny will fade into insignificance at the dawning of eternity (Matt 3:9).

Even in this life, foundational family loyalties must pale in comparison to our ultimate loyalty to the triune God. Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not

hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).⁵ This does not absolve believing parents of their responsibility to train their children in the fear of God; it does mean that every aspect of parenting is to be undertaken in light of a greater allegiance to the glory of God.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Beyond the overarching contours of the divine metanarrative, what explicit New Testament instructions do we find addressed to parents? The New Testament authors regularly remind parents of their basic creational obligation to nurture and to love their children (Col 3:21; 1 Tim 2:15; 5:8). This included an apparent assumption that Christian fathers should discipline their children for wrongdoings (Heb 12:9).

“He Must Manage His Household Well”

One of the New Testament qualifications for men to be elders or deacons in the church is the capacity to manage a household well (1 Tim 3:4-5, 12; Titus 1:6). This does not mean that fathers can somehow force their children become believers.⁶ It does mean that, as long as their children are living in their households, elders and deacons must discipline and love their children so that their families maintain orderly and respectful household environments. This is not merely a suggestion for elders and deacons; it is an essential expectation for their role.

“In the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord”

Throughout the New Testament, the inspired authors consistently assumed that believers would be eager and able to spread the good news of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20; Eph 6:15-17; Phil 2:16; Col 4:6; 1 Thess 4:12; 1 Pet 2:9-12).⁷ At one point, Paul spoke of the loving concern that he expected a believing spouse to have for the salvation of a non-believing husband or wife (1 Cor 7:12-16). Though it is rarely mentioned in any explicit way, part of the deep love that parents have for children includes a desire for them to know and to respond to the Gospel—a concern that a Christian is always to have for

all persons (1 Cor 10:33—11:1). The New Testament passage which speaks most clearly about this spiritual concern of a parent for child is Ephesians 6:4: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

In looking at this text, one must first note that Paul singled out *the father* as primarily responsible for his children’s moral and spiritual care. This focus on fathers does not exclude mothers; it does, however, highlight the biblical headship of the husband—a theme reiterated throughout Scripture (Eph 5:22-23). A father is uniquely responsible to God for his children.

Early Christians did possess some practical parental instructions in Proverbs and other Old Testament texts (for examples, see Deut 6:4-9; Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15). Particularly in the New Testament, however, the instructions for parents tend to be more general.⁸ As a result, these inspired instructions are equally applicable in oral and written cultures—in environments with a wealth of Christian resources as well as those with almost none. In one setting, a father might fulfill Ephesians 6:4 by sharing the stories about Jesus that he himself has learned orally while he and his son work side-by-side in a field. In another setting, a father might warn or encourage his daughter via a timely text message sent to her cell phone. In yet another time or place, a father might employ puppets or songs or a family project to present the truths of the Bible in a creative and winsome manner. The biblical principle of Ephesians 6:4 allows a broad range of possible expressions. What remains the same, regardless of context or culture, is that God has called parents—and particularly fathers—to function as primary faith-trainers in their children’s lives.

In the narrative of Acts, the reports of household conversions highlight the importance of parents passing on the faith to their children. In three separate instances, a father’s initial interest in the Christian faith resulted in his entire family responding to the Gospel (Acts 10:1-2; 16:31-33; 18:8). The biblical descriptions of what the persons in the household actually *did*—they heard, received, and believed the proclaimed message—suggest that infants were not included among the baptized members of the household.⁹ What is clear in Acts is the foundational role of a father in guiding his family

toward Christian. In one instance where no father is mentioned, the mother takes on this foundational role (Acts 16:1-3, 15). Other texts that identify households by husband or wife—perhaps indicating which person was the initial believer—further highlight the foundational spiritual role of parents (1 Cor 1:11, 16; 16:15-16; 2 Tim 1:5).

“Do Not Provoke Your Children to Anger”

Paul was realistic about the challenge of sinful fathers raising sinful children. One natural reaction to the demands of raising a child is frustration or anger, which may in turn provoke a similar response in the child (see also Col 3:21). Apart from the renewing work of God’s Spirit, sinful fathers are likely to leave a legacy of emotionally abused and resentful children. Empowered by God’s Spirit, however, not only can Christian fathers *not* provoke their children, but they can even “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”¹⁰ Paul did not provide step-by-step details for bringing up children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” The text does clearly indicate that Christian fathers should train their children in Gospel-centered spiritual truths (“instruction”), as well as providing discipline that is shaped by the character of Jesus (“of the Lord”).

“Children, Obey Your Parents”

The primary explicit instruction given to children in the New Testament is that children must obey their parents (Eph 6:1). In Colossians 3:20-21, Paul even declared, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” (In telling children to obey their parents in “everything,” Paul was, of course, using hyperbole. The apostle was not commanding children to obey instructions that were iniquitous or ridiculous.)¹¹ Similarly, in Ephesians 6:1-3, Paul wrote: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’” Paul qualified this exhortation with the prepositional phrase, “in the Lord.” What Paul seems to have been saying was that

obedience to parents is always informed by the lordship of The Messiah and that bowing one’s will to parents is ultimately an expression of bowing one’s knee to the Lord. Paul left no room for ambiguity. Obeying one’s parents “is right.”

By quoting Exodus 20:12, Paul reminded his readers that this obedience stands in continuity with expectations for families in the Old Testament. But there is this difference: Empowered by God’s Spirit, New Testament believers can fulfill what was previously impossible. Believing children can honor their parents and experience both eternal and temporal blessings.

Later in the New Testament, Paul reminded Timothy, a young man who came from a household with a believing mother, to treasure the spiritual legacy that he had received through his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5-6). Paul’s conversation with Timothy reminds Christian parents today what a privilege they have in setting the spiritual course for their children’s lives.

Partnership between Church and Household in the New Testament

New Testament instructions to parents and children were first communicated orally to an assembled body of believers. The presence of direct commands to children in the texts (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20-21) suggests that children of various ages and varying commitments were present with their parents. Both parents and children received instructions in the presence of one another and in the presence of the community of faith.

But how did early Christians cooperate and share in the training of one another’s children? The text of the New Testament does not explicitly provide this information. Believers did, however, regularly meet for fellowship and worship in one another’s homes as well as sacrificially sharing material resources (Acts 2:44-47). Such habits would, at the very least, provide a winsome context for the children in attendance. If pagan guests could visit a Christian gathering and exclaim, “God is really among you,” (1 Cor 14:25), certainly children in regular attendance could be expected to do the same. If the non-believing outsider could look at the followers of Jesus and say, “See how they love one another” (John 13:35), certainly the child of Christian parents could be

expected to reach the same judgment.

While the New Testament clearly assigns parents the primary role of managing and instructing their households, biblical authors also recognized that God gifts specific people within the local community of faith to instruct and to shepherd the congregation (Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:2). Every man is called to shepherd his family (Eph 5:25-29; 6:4), but not every man is gifted in quite the same way to function in the role of a teacher. In some cases, persons other than elders are gifted to teach within in the community of faith (Col 3:16; Heb 5:12; James 3:1). The recognition of such gifting within the broader community suggests that children might benefit from gathering to receive teaching from God-gifted instructors other than their parents. In some cases, these gatherings might occur in age-organized contexts.

EXAMPLES AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILIES AMONG EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

In the Christian writings that followed the New Testament era, the instructions for parents are similar to the ones found in the New Testament. Early Christian leaders reminded husbands and wives of their obligation to love one another, to live in orderly households, and to love their children.¹²

“I Received from my Parents This Good Confession”

Over and over, parents were called to train their children in the Christian faith:

Let our children receive the instruction that is in Christ: let them learn how strong humility is before God, what pure love is able to accomplish before God, how the fear of him is good and great and saves all those who live in it in holiness with a pure mind. (*1 Clement* 21:8)¹³

Fathers, “bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” and teach them the Holy Scriptures, and also trades, that they may not indulge in idleness. Now the Scripture says, “A righteous father educates his children well; his

heart shall rejoice in a wise son.” (Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians*, 4:5)¹⁴

You shall not abort a child nor, again, commit infanticide. You must not withhold your hand from your son or daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God (*Epistle of Barnabas* 19:5)

[Christians] marry just like everyone else, and they have children, but they do not cast out their offspring. (*Epistle to Diognetus*, 5:6)

Then instruct your wives to continue in the faith delivered to them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all fidelity and loving all others equally in all chastity, and to teach their children with instruction that leads to the fear of God. (Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, 4:2)

You shall not withhold your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God. (*Didache* 4:9).

As in Ephesians 6:4, these texts do not provide step-by-step instructions for the parental discipleship of children. Yet parents are presented with a fundamental obligation to function as primary faith-trainers in their children’s lives.

This second-century account of martyrdom makes it clear that early Christian parents *did* impress vital theological truths on their children:

A man called Paeon stood up and said, “I also am a Christian.”

The prefect Rusticus said: “Who taught you?”

Paeon said, “I received from my parents this good confession”

Eulpistus said, “I listened indeed gladly to the words of Justin, but I too received Christianity from my parents.”

The prefect Rusticus said, “Where are your parents?”

Eulpistus said: “In Cappadocia.”

Rusticus said to Hierax: “Where are your parents?”

He answered, saying, “Our true father is Christ, and our mother our faith in him. My earthly

parents are dead, and I was dragged away from Iconium in Phrygia before coming hither.”¹⁵

As in Paul’s letter to Ephesus, early Christian writers do not provide specific examples of how children must be instructed. Yet the basic obligation remains clear. Just as the earliest Christians in the post-New Testament period found different ways to convey the faith to their children, so today, believers in varying cultures and with diverse educational backgrounds will find different ways to convey the gospel to their children in winsome and faithful ways.

“God Is Angry With You”

When parents failed to heed their obligation to pass on the “good confession” of a living faith to their children, the results could be disastrous. The unknown author of a second-century text known as *Shepherd of Hermas* recognized the tragedy of such failures. Throughout this document, a divine messenger upbraids Hermas—the Christian man addressed in the text—for his failure to provide spiritual leadership for his family:

God is angry with you . . . in order that you may convert your family, which has sinned against the Lord and against you, their parents. But you are so fond of your children that you have not corrected your family, but have allowed it to become terribly corrupt. This is why the Lord is angry with you. But he will heal all your past deeds that have been done by your family, for because of their sins and transgressions you have been corrupted by the cares of this life. (*Shepherd of Hermas: Vision 1:3:1*)¹⁶

When children failed to obey their parents, such failure was viewed concurrently as disobedience to God, with temporal and eternal consequences.¹⁷

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND HOUSEHOLD IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

In writings from the first three centuries of Christianity, children were addressed alongside their parents, reminding us that children were part of Christian gatherings.¹⁸ In a few texts, Christian leaders gave general exhortations about the importance of training the next generation. The most natural way to read these passages is as proclamations addressed primarily to parents. These passages do not, however, preclude the broader community’s involvement in children’s discipleship. “Let us fear the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us,” Clement of Rome urged his entire congregation in the late first century. “Let us respect our leaders; let us honor the older men; let us instruct the young with instruction that leads to the fear of God.”¹⁹ From Clement’s commands to the believers in Rome, it appears that the community of faith bore a corporate responsibility to train the young (*neoi*, no longer children but also not yet fully mature).

Pastors were quite willing to engage personally in the spiritual development of young people. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 260–340), the apostle John once entrusted a child to the care of a local elder. The young boy was baptized—but then, as a young adult, turned astray and joined a gang of thieves. Hearing this, the apostle John mounted a horse and personally pursued the young man into the mountains to call him to repentance,²⁰ crying out, “Why, my son, do you flee from me, your own father, unarmed, aged? Pity me, my son; fear not; you have still hope of life. I will give account to Christ for you. If need be, I will willingly endure your death as the Lord suffered death for us. For you, I would give up my life. Stand and believe! Christ has sent me!”

By the second and third centuries, the practice of infant baptism seems to have been widespread in many areas, with baptized children partaking of the Lord’s Supper.²¹ Even if such practices represent well-intended misapprehensions of the apostolic understanding of baptism, they also demonstrate the early church’s passion to pass along the Christian faith to the next genera-

tion. In the third century, Cyprian mentioned a boy of unspecified age who served as a lector—a reader of the Scriptures—in the church.²²

An Age-Old Struggle

“It’s Sunday Schools!” he assured me in that Italian restaurant in San Antonio. “They’ve destroyed the faith of children!”—and he blamed church-based children’s programs for the failure of parents to disciple their progeny. And yet, it is clear from the New Testament and other early Christian texts that, centuries before Sunday Schools even existed, Christian parents struggled at times to fulfill their calling to disciple their children. Then, as now, it was not a church program that caused the problem or provided the solution. What was needed was—and is—to call parents back to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As parents live genuine lives of repentance and faith together in community with other believers, their faith will be both “caught by” and “taught to” the each generation. Parents must embrace their roles not only as providers and disciplinarians but also as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.

ENDNOTES

- ¹See also Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians*, 4:3-5.
- ²Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage” (1522) in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed., edited by Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 159.
- ³C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (Edison, NJ: Inspiration Press, 1994), 286.
- ⁴“Angriest Americans: Young People, Parents.” Story from LiveScience, posted December 3, 2009 on <<http://www.msnbc.com>>. Site accessed December 14, 2009. The full details of the study reported in this article are to be found in Scott Schieman’s chapter in *International Handbook of Anger* (New York: Springer, 2010); Neil Chethik, *VoiceMale: What Husbands Really Think About Their Marriages, Their Wives, Sex, Housework, and Commitment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).
- ⁵On Luke 14:26, Robert Stein comments, “From

Matt 10:37 we know that this means to ‘love [one’s family] less.’ This is evident from Gen 29:30-31, where Jacob’s greater love for Rachel (29:30) is phrased as hating Leah (29:31, RSV). . . . A person who commits himself or herself to Christ will develop a greater love for both neighbor and family, although at times loving and following Christ may be seen as renunciation, rejection, or hate if the family does not share the same commitment to Christ” (*Luke* [Nashville: B&H, 1992]).

⁶The adjective *pistos* in Titus 1:6 refers to the children’s faithfulness—that is to say, in this context, submission or respectful obedience. See George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1992), 289-90.

⁷Robert L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006)

⁸William Barclay, *Train up a Child: Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 235-36.

⁹Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 178.

¹⁰In reference to Ephesians 6:4, Ernest Best writes, “[Fathers] are not to irritate their children but to provide the conditions under which Christian maturity can develop” (*Ephesians*, New Testament Guides [Sheffield: JSOT, 1993], 57).

¹¹See further discussion on detecting and interpreting hyperbole, see Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2010), 219-26.

¹²See, e.g., *1 Clement* 21:6, 8; Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 4:3, 5; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19:5.

¹³English translations of these texts are from Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

¹⁴This longer version of Ignatius’ letter is found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. English translations of the letter are by these editors.

- ¹⁵*Martyrdom of Justin and His Companions* 4 (ca. 165), cited by James Riley Estep Jr., “The Christian Nurture of Children in the Second and Third Centuries,” in *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 71. See also Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 15.
- ¹⁶In *Shepherd of Hermas*, see also *Vision* 2.3.1; 3.9.1; *Mandate* 12.3.6; *Similitude* 5.3.9; 7.1.6.
- ¹⁷Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 4:3 [long version]; *Shepherd of Hermas: Similitude* 7:1:6.
- ¹⁸Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 13:1 [long version]; Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 8:2 [long version].
- ¹⁹*1 Clement* 21:6.
- ²⁰Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:23. Thanks to Jared Kennedy for pointing out this story to us.
- ²¹Estep cites Hippolytus, *Apostolike Paradosis*, 21 and 23 as well as Cyprian, *On the Lapsed*, 25 (“The Christian Nurture of Children in the Second and Third Centuries,” in *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality*, 68-69).
- ²²Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, 32, cited in James Riley Estep Jr., “The Christian Nurture of Children in the Second and Third Centuries,” in *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008) 67.