

The Relation Between Home and Church

[Prepared for the Michigan District Convention, June 15, 1972]

By Milton P. Spaude

Introduction

We sometimes hear it said of a person that he is self-educated. For example, Thomas Edison, the great inventor, is spoken of as a self-educated person. But actually no person is truly self-educated. Involved in the education of an individual are the home, the school, the church, the whole community through its influences, the times, and finally the entire world in which he lives. All of these influences affect the education of a person.

But as far as Christian education or religious training is concerned, the two most influential agencies are the home and the church.

Of course, there are those who would question that last statement. There are parents who want little or nothing to do with the religious training of their children. "That's the job of the church," they say, implying that the home has no responsibility in this respect. And there are also people who look upon the church as merely a social agency, a place for entertainment and fellowship, again implying that the church has little or no responsibility in the spiritual training of children.

But the fact of the matter is that *both* the home and the church are to be involved in the business of Christian education, in the religious training of people. What then is the role of the home in this respect? What is the role of the church? Do they have separate and distinct responsibilities and spheres of duty? Or do they have the same goals and objectives, differing only in the methods of reaching them? Or perhaps, does the home have a responsibility that concerns itself only with the youth, while the church's responsibility is with the adults?

All of this leads to the topic of the paper before you, namely, *The Relation between the Home and the Church*. In dealing with this topic we shall first look at the home, or family, and its purpose. Then we shall examine the church and its role. And finally we shall investigate the working relationship between the home and the church.

II. The Home or Family

The home or family is divinely instituted by God in His providence. This God did when He ordained matrimony, when He said that it was not good for Adam to live alone and created the perfect mate for him (Gen. 2:18) and when He proclaimed that a man should leave father and mother and "cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

That God instituted the family arrangement can also be clearly seen from the many commandments that God has regulating family life. Think of the fifth chapter of Ephesians, where God directs the wives to submit themselves to the husbands and the husbands to love their wives. Think of Ephesians, chapter six, where He prescribes the duties of children toward their parents and also the duties of parents toward their children. And then think also of the Sixth Commandment, by which God built a wall of protection around marriage, the family, and the home, so that it might remain the stable basic unit of our society. Yes, the family, or the home, has been established by God and ought ever to be considered as such.

God had a purpose for instituting family life; and this purpose may be considered to be fourfold: (1) to promote the happiness of husband and wife through the fellowship, companionship, and mutual service that comes when man and wife love, serve, and honor each other as they ought, (2) to promote decency and order as far as sex relations are concerned (I Cor. 7:2-5), (3) to continue His creation through the birth of children, and (4) to provide for the proper rearing and training of children. And it is this last-mentioned purpose that may be considered to be of utmost importance. God instituted family life for the purpose of bringing up children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). This must never be forgotten.

For the parents then it means that God has bestowed upon them the prime responsibility of training their children. The children belong to the parents, not to the state and not to the church. And because of this parents have the duty to care for and train their children, and especially to teach them diligently the truths of Scripture,

so that they may be made “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). The importance of this cannot be stressed too much—parents have the obligation to train their children in the truths of God’s Word.

That God should lay this responsibility upon the parents is only natural and logical. After all, a child’s home is his world, the only world he knows in the beginning years of his life. To be sure, later he will gradually come to know another and wider world, one which will modify, to a greater or smaller extent, many of his earlier impressions. But still what he has learned in his youth will remain with him, to alter, strengthen, restrain, and interpret the many new impressions and experiences of later life. “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

The home is to be more than just a place to hang the hat and get a bite to eat. It is to be a place where wholesome emotions are nurtured, where proper attitudes and beliefs are developed, where values—both spiritual and moral—are transmitted, and where good social relationships are fostered. It is to be a place of love, joy, contentment, peace, a place of working together, a place of sharing, a place which brings pleasant thoughts and fondest recollections.

For the Christian the home is also the dwelling place of God, a place where “Christ is the Head of the house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation,” as the familiar wall plaque so beautifully declares. The Christian home is not built with human hands, but with human hearts redeemed by Christ. It is a home where the members of the family believe in Jesus as their Savior, where the Word of God is used, loved and reigned supreme, and where the family members love and live for one another; and all live for God.

The Christian home is a place dedicated to serve the Lord, as was the home of Joshua, who said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Serving the Lord may take many different forms. It, of course, includes the Christian training of children, family devotions, prayer, the living of decent and God-pleasing lives by parents and children. It includes working for and supporting the preaching of God’s Word, worshipping together in church on Sunday morning and hearing witness to one’s faith before the world.

But, again, of all of these functions and aspects of the home the one of the greatest importance is the teaching of the children the Word of God and training them to walk in His ways. And the responsibility for this falls directly upon the parents, or upon the fathers as Paul puts it in Ephesians 6:4, “Ye *fathers*,...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

III. The Church

Another institution of divine origin is the church, whether it is considered to be the local congregation or, in a wider sense, the Synod, or, for that matter, any body of Christians gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20). However, in this presentation we shall limit the definition of the church primarily to the local congregation; for this is the agency which usually influences and becomes directly involved with the activity of the home and family life.

Now to the church have been committed the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 16:18,19). Or to put it differently, it is the church which has the stewardship of the means of grace. Just how and in what form the church is to administer the keys has not been prescribed by our Lord. He gave no detailed instructions about the manner of their use. But the church is to use the keys; it is to apply the means of grace; it is to preach the Word in season and out of season; and likewise it is to administer the sacraments according to the words of institution. This, then, is the chief purpose of the church. This, then, is also the reason why Christians will organize congregations—for the purpose of mutual edification in the means of grace, for more efficient work in the Kingdom of our Lord, and for the spreading of the Kingdom by doing mission work.

More than this the church dare not do, for its scope of power is limited by the Word. It reaches as far as the Word of God reaches, and not a whit further. The church is to teach men to observe all things Christ has commanded, and only what He has commanded (Matt. 28:20). Whatever the Bible teaches, commands, and promises, the church must teach, command, and promise.

But now in summary, what is the proper God-given activity and work of the church, especially the local congregation? We list the following: joint prayer, joint hearing of the Word, joint use of the sacraments, joint education of the children, Joint work in spreading the Gospel, and finally, joint exercise of love and charity.

IV. Relation between the Home and the Church

Having briefly presented the role of the home and the church, we now ask what is the relation between them. Are the home and the church two separate entities with no relation between them? Do they have completely separate goals? Or do their spheres of activity overlap and even at times become one and the same? If they have similar or the same objectives, are they to function and operate together, one working hand in hand with the other; or are they each to pursue their own course working independently of the other? These are some of the questions we shall now attempt to answer.

From what has been mentioned previously we learn that the home and the church do have activities and work that are the same or, at least, overlap. The home is concerned with the religious training of the youth and also the adults; so is the church. The home seeks to foster God-pleasing family behavior; so does the church. The home wants love, peace, decency, honor and faithfulness on the part of all; so does the church. The home desires to nourish family devotions, prayer life, church attendance, and use of the sacraments; so does the church. The home is interested in spreading the Gospel; so is the church. Yes, the home and the church have much in common.

Because of this closeness of purpose, *the home needs the church*. It needs the church if it is to bring up children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If parents are to train their offspring in the truths of God's Word, they themselves must know the Word of God. One cannot teach what he does not know. How can a mother teach her child a bedtime prayer if she does not know what God-pleasing prayer is? How can the father lead the family in devotion if he can barely pronounce the proper names in the Bible or if he cannot read the Scriptures with understanding and familiarity? How can parents answer the many religious questions which children ask if they themselves do not know? Furthermore, can parents be expected to train their children in the ways of God, if they themselves do not believe and accept Christ as their Savior? It would be illogical to think otherwise. No, parents must know and believe the truths of God's Word if they are expected to train, teach, guide, influence, and lead others.

It is in this area of the home that the church plays an important role. The church is an institution dedicated to train and teach all, both the parents and the children. It is from the church then that parents can learn the truths of Scripture, both for themselves and for teaching to their children. By hearing the Word of God preached Sunday after Sunday from the pulpit they learn of the severity and justice of God's law and likewise of God's love and forgiveness through the meritorious work of Christ. Through divine worship, Bible study, religious discussions in various organizations, and in any other way in which the church uses the means of grace, parents can learn to know more about God and His love toward man and at the same time have their faith strengthened by the continual working of God's Holy Spirit.

Parents are to have and to teach their children good moral standards—standards which are determined not by the government, society, or professors of sociology, but by God alone. Here again the church plays a very helpful role in training and guiding parents in God's Word, especially in this day and age when there is so much fuzzy thinking on what is right and wrong and who determines it. The church must insist and continue to tell that it is God's Word which determines moral standards and not the ideas and thinking of men.

Parents and children are to live together in a God-pleasing fashion. Therefore, the members of the family, and especially the parents, must know the pattern of authority as laid down by Scripture. They must know proper husband-and-wife relationship. They must realize what is the God-pleasing relation between parents and children. They must learn that true happiness in a family comes from following the will of the Lord in every detail of life. Here again the church can be very useful in guiding and training the parents in what the Word of God has to say on these matters.

Parents are to set good examples for their children if they are to be successful in their teaching and training. "Religion is caught as well as taught," it is said. How can a little girl believe that attending Sunday

School or church service on Sunday morning is of primary importance when her parents go back to bed or are absorbed in the Sunday paper after they have hustled her off to Sunday-School? How can a boy really believe that honesty is pleasing to God when he hears his father or mother tell lies on some so-called “necessary” occasions? How can parents expect their sons and daughters to avoid profanity if they use the name of God in vain upon the slightest provocation? Here, too, the church can lend its helping hand by telling parents what God’s Word has to say about giving proper and God-pleasing examples for the children to follow.

Surely parents need the church for growth in knowledge of God and His ways. This is one reason why believers come together to form congregations, so that they can mutually serve and edify one another in the truths of God by having systematic worship and regular preaching of His Word.

Now some will argue that you do not have to go or belong to a church to learn God’s Word. You can do it yourself. This is true, and also something that every person should strive to do. But still, we must declare that it is not easy for parents to teach themselves by private Bible study and the like. For one thing we still have in us the “Old Adam,” that makes us somewhat lazy and at times indifferent towards private study of the Scriptures. Then too, there is the old question of when do we find the time for Bible study. And also do not forget there is the problem of correctly understanding the Word of God according to sound exegetical, philological, and scriptural interpretation. In the church the called workers, and especially the pastors, have been trained to do that very thing. Therefore, the church properly can and ought to be a leading agency in guiding and helping parents to fulfill their role in child-training. Truly the home, and especially the parents, need the church.

Not only does the church train parents to be Christian parents, but the church also offers and provides for the *direct* training of children, in order to help the parents in their God-given obligation to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This the church does by conducting Sunday Schools. Here the preachers are trained by the pastor to present to the little ones a systematic course of Bible study.

Many congregations also maintain Christian Day Schools, where dedicated, trained, Christian teachers have the children under their supervision for some 180 days out of the year—to instruct them in God’s Word, to teach them the secular subjects in the light of Holy Scripture and to impart to them Christian discipline.

The church may also sponsor various youth groups within its midst where Christian fellowship is fostered.

And last, but certainly not least in importance, the church regularly conducts Confirmation Classes in which the pastor spends many hours diligently teaching the church’s youth the fundamental truths of God’s Word.

All of these educational facilities the church provides for the parents and the home, not that it wants to supplant the parents, but rather that it wants to help the parents in training their children. Indeed, the home needs the church.

Not only does the home need the church because it assists in training children, in determining proper moral standards, in teaching Christian behavior, in transmitting God-pleasing values and in instructing members of the family how to live peaceably with one another; but the church also provides for the administration of the sacraments and the preaching of God’s Word. It makes the means of grace readily available for all. It provides for joint worship and Christian fellowship for the entire family. It enables the family to serve the Lord by spreading the Gospel in supporting mission work and by furthering the Kingdom of God in lending a son or daughter to the Lord as a pastor or teacher. Yes, indeed, the home needs the church.

But the church also needs the home. Churches or congregations as we know them today may be considered to be groups of families who have joined together in Christian fellowship. The church needs families for the labor and work that family members provide. We think of all the positions of labor in the congregation, the organist, choir director and choir members, the janitor, the officers of the church council, Sunday School teachers, Pioneer leaders, altar guild members, and many others.

The church needs the home for financial support. Anyone who has sat in on a church council meeting knows the importance of money in the work of the church, both on the local level and also on the synodical level.

The church needs the home to supply its pastors, missionaries, and teachers. Again not much need be said, except that without the support, encouragement, and parental guidance, which come from the home, the church would soon experience a severe shortage of workers.

The church certainly needs the home, just as the home needs the church. Together they form a blessed working partnership. They have a common objective, to lead people, both the young and the old, to the Church Triumphant and the eternal home in heaven. In reaching this objective they are to work together, each one helping the other.

It is said that the fires of faith burning in the home are lit from the fires on God's altar. Yes, it is from the church, the steward of the means of grace, that the members of the family receive the spiritual food necessary for their salvation. The home needs the help of the church in fulfilling all of its functions and obligations, of which the training of the children is very important.

On the other hand the church needs the help and support of the home. No congregation is stronger than the households which make up its membership and the faith, love, and hope practiced in the homes. The church needs the help of the home to achieve its goal of reaching, teaching, and preaching to all sinful men.

Yes, the church and the home have a common purpose or objective, but this mutual goal can be reached only through the partnership of the church and the home. Neither one is to supplant the other; rather, both are to support each other. The home and the church must work together. They must pray together. They must come together as partners to consult with each other concerning their mutual interests and activities. Yes, indeed, the home and the church form a wonderful and blessed partnership in the glorious work of building the Kingdom of God. Together they form a team that is invincible; separated, they both would suffer great loss and eventual ruin.