

Sincerely Yours

from Covenant Theological Seminary

Rearing Covenant Children In Faith

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In the last edition of Sincerely Yours, Dr. Dan Doriani urged parents to rear their children in love while Dr. Jack Collins urged parents to work in faith. Now they write together on parenting in confidence without presumption.

Parenting is an important, complex and occasionally frightening responsibility. The complexity sometimes prompts earnest parents to seize one principle and stress it to the

neglect of other parts of biblical truth about parenting.

For example, techniques of child-rearing surely have value, but unless parents use them with love, an undue emphasis on methods can decline into self-serving attempts simply to control a child. Similarly, confidence in the biblical promise that God loves and covenantally claims the children of believers can be misinterpreted as a guarantee that the children will be saved,

if the parents carefully train them in the faith.

Peter's statement, "The promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39) gives Christian parents a confidence in God's aid and care that produces diligent obedience, but it is not a guarantee of automatic regeneration (even adult church membership does not automatically secure salvation).

Christian parents operate in faith, not fear, but this faith in God's care for the children of believers is not presumpt-



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tion. The promise means that we view covenant children as members of God's household, under the covering of the grace that is active in Christian homes, but there is no removal of responsibility -- no guarantee of salvation. Therefore covenant children must make a public and personal affirmation of faith when they come to the age of discretion.

...techniques of child-rearing surely have value, but unless parents use them with love, [they] can decline into self-serving attempts simply to control a child.

They must confess their sinfulness and claim Christ as Lord and Savior, just like believers who grew up outside the faith.

So we affirm two truths:

First, The children of believers differ from other children in that they have the privileges of covenant upbringing. There is ground for confidence that the Lord sets them apart by placing his love on them.

Second, We know that Adam literally raised Cain, that Isaac raised Esau, that

David's favorite son betrayed him. (Each had the privileges of the Covenant but rejected the faith of their families.) We recall that the great majority of the Exodus generation, who were "baptized into Moses...in the Sea" perished without receiving their promised rest because they did not combine the promise of rest with faith (1 Cor 10:1-11, Heb 4:1-2).

While warnings forbid overconfidence, promises instill a humble confidence in God's covenant provisions that inspires diligent obedience. This means parents make sure their children are confident of parental love, not due to

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the children's performance (because obedience must be a response to love, not a way to earn it). It means that we work hard to see that our children obey us, and repent when they disobey (that's how they learn to relate to God).



We constantly teach them about the Lord and the absolute necessity of faith in him, and help them profess their faith publicly (Rom 10:9-10). We will model Christian living in the home (including family Bible reading and prayer). And we will insist, as much as it lies in us through their years at home, that they take part in the life of the church - singing hymns, praying, giving their offerings and offering service at an early age.

This is a tall, even an impossible order! But as we believe God's promises and express that faith by fervent prayer and diligent obedience, we will find, like Paul, that our competence comes from God, who uses us as instruments of his grace to our precious children (2 Cor 3:5-6).