

But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. (Psa 86:15)

As we send our young ones back to school, or in some cases into the schools for the first time, it is of critical importance that we do not lose sight of the fact that while learning science, and reading, language and arithmetic are important to their membership in this society, it is incumbent upon us to keep before them and to heartily instruct them in the ways of the Lord.

Despite society telling us that instructing our children in the ways of God is cruelty and we should be letting individuals who can't determine whether paste has adequate nutritional value focus their spiritual energy where they want to focus it, I say that our religion should fully be their religion,

Deu 6:6-7 "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

There is a constant battle here. We owe it to our Master and to those whom He has entrusted to us to inculcate the truths we hold dear on them with more tenacity than those we hand them to will use to teach them the ways of Satan. The praises of God are more valuable to them than all the math and science and language arts they can consume in a day. It is a reasonable service whereby we glorify our King by telling and retelling His praises and putting His works in front of them to make them known to them **as** His works.

While there are a number of times in the Law where this point is made, I think one of the most complete and instructive examples comes from Asaph in Psalm 78. I was reading here with my family recently and it struck me how relevant Asaph's words are at this hour.

The Psalm starts with this introduction:

*Psa 78:1-3 **Maschil of Asaph.** Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: 3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.*

A maschil is a Psalm of specific instruction. A song written to clarify and to make memorable an important, soul-critical teaching. The words of a maschil Psalm in the original are meant to be memorable to the ear as well as to the mind. The word is only used 13 times in Scripture, all in the Psalms, all around concepts or instructions that

are crucial to our service to the King. These maschils are arguably the most perilous words in Scripture to disregard.

To add to the importance of what is being said, Asaph draws even more attention to it with the declaration and commandment to give our ears, that is our whole undivided and intentional attention to what is being said. But he calls the listener (and reader) to do even more, i.e., to incline our ears. We are not only to open our ears to hearing with some active listening, but to lean in, to get close as if the words were being whispered to us in an extremely crowded and loud room. These are words we likely should put some extreme stock in.

The reason why such attention is required is detailed in Asaph's introduction as well. Close attention is necessary to prevent the misapplication or misunderstanding. This attention to the words is particularly important because they are being spoken in a parable. Parables are used throughout Scripture, and this passage is actually prophesying about Christ's use of them as is described in Matthew:

Mat 13:34-35 "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: 35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."

A parable is a similitude, generally wrapped in a metaphorical story. It can be difficult to understand without the proper context or explanation. Christ used this rhetorical tool extensively and tells us precisely why

Mat 13:10-16 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? 11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. 12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. 13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

This applies to this parable of Asaph as well. The understanding of these words in their full sense and application requires "eyes to see and ears to hear". When looking at the entire Psalm, it is a simple mistake to make to dismiss this as a history lesson and not

much more. The Jews are heavily invested in their histories, after all, as a cultural binding point. While it *is* a history lesson, it is much more than that as the language of the next part of the passage shows:

Psa 78:4 “We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”

This might be considered a strange turn of phrase that “we will not hide them from *their* children” and would seem to make more sense if it were “*our* children” or “*your* children”. I believe this is maybe one of the most important elements of what Asaph is teaching here. It should be obvious to anyone that you have a responsibility to teach your own children. This speaks to a greater responsibility. We have an obligation to make these truths plain in a practical and experimental way to our children, and our “father’s children” as it were. The idea is that we are accountable to each other for bringing truth, by word and conversation to the whole gambit of the young people around us. Children are impressionable and easily manipulated. When we hand them over for eight or more hours a day to Satan, we have to be even more diligent in delivering a consistent and repeated testimony in front of them.

Deu 6:7-8 “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.”

The exposure our children should have to the truth is literally constant, and that’s our job, so that the exposure they have to the deceit of the world is countermanded. Our obligation, better understood as our privilege in serving the King, is not limited in scope to our own flesh and blood children. It extends up the generational ladder and down and across the entire familial landscape at a minimum. I believe that Asaph’s words direct us to a focal point on young people as an audience not just privately but publicly. Think about all the influences these children have around them teaching that they’re “perfect just the way they are” and they should just explore whatever feels good on a day. They are inundated with a message contrary to Scripture.

Then, when their consciences start to prick them, they have nowhere to go; they just spiral down into a deeper and deeper losing pattern encouraged by those around them. They get put onto narcotics or into so-called “therapy”. Their influences teach them things like “Jesus was transgender”, their religious leaders abuse them physically, as well as by teaching them things like El Shaddai teaches – that there is no religion only relationship, that you don’t have to obey, just have a “personal relationship with Christ”. This of course denies the truth of Solomon’s conclusion

Ecc 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Which John reinforces

2Jn 1:5-6 "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

Religion is neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive to a relationship. Followers of Christ have both. Our relationship (and I'm not a huge fan of using that word in this context) is a drive toward unity with Christ which provides access to privilege and peace; but simultaneously religious obedience is a critical sign of our calling, and it is something clearly spoken to throughout Scripture; Christ Himself directly calls to obedience and you ignore that at your own peril. What have you done but serve the children up on a platter to Satan if you teach them such a doctrine!

Our children deserve and we are expected to teach them this fundamental truth. To the world this is a "dark saying of old", that is, not understood or accepted broadly but true from before the foundation of the world. It is the Gospel. Teaching our children the true Gospel is shewing the praises of the LORD, shewing His strength, shewing His wonderful works.

Everything in the Gospel points at His strength and works. Everything tied up in the return of Christ is wrapped up in the teachings we are responsible to pass on to younger generations. Just teaching them "Christ" or "the cross" as a generic unexplained rote concept is not only helpful, it is a disservice. We must teach the whole Gospel of God.

I think it is important to make the point that verses 3 and 4 are not talking about "traditions". We do not traffic in "traditions", we traffic in the truth to our children. The notion this Psalm justifies things like the so-called Orthodox church's deceit that the traditions of their long-dead forefathers can and should pre-empt the Scripture, or that the Jewish Mishnas and Talmuds should supersede and replace the Law of Moses is folly. It should be clear that traditions of men are not meant here, given how frequently Christ upbraids the Pharisees for their clinging to them and to teach anything else is a false doctrine.

The words here actually give clear understanding that this is not about tradition:

Psa 78:5 "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:"

It is the law and the testimony we are supposed to engrain in our children's lives. This can't be much plainer. Asaph could have easily added the traditions of Moses, of their fathers before them, but these are not modern ideas of morality and "individual truth" that are called for. These are "sayings of old", "secret from the foundation of the world" – there was no corruption of man at the foundation of the world, no manipulation or so-called modernization of the message until after man corrupted everything through sin. We aren't supposed to be teaching them those ways of man; we're teaching them His ways. Don't think great thoughts, just read the words. Teach the words. Cause the children of the generations around you to know His ways and His truth. Not your ways and your truth. These distinctions matter.

While we aren't busy teaching traditions as the foundation for future generations to build upon, each generation needs to carefully examine what is being taught and how. Each generation that assumes teaching duty assumes a deep responsibility. They must assess what it is the body does to serve God faithfully and how it seeks to adhere to the standards. Examine these ways closely and carefully and either continue in them, or correct and establish, from new-found light, new ways to carry forward. To reiterate, I'm not talking about changing the landmarks, I'm talking about how we serve on a daily basis.

There are some things that are non-negotiable because they are so plain and laid out that you must not change them, like the ordinances. Like simple truths that women are not preachers in God's church. That brotherly love must continue and grow. That the same God that sent His Son to suffer for sin also destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and created Hell to fulfill His purposes. That charity and loving our enemies are required behaviors of Christ's Bride. These things cannot be sloughed off, they do not change and they do not expire.

But determining the 'how'? Every generation of new believers has to establish in their own hearts that this or that approach is appropriate, according to the light in which they walk. "That's the way we've always done it" is not an adequate or frankly an appropriate position to take. We all will have to stand before the King to give account, and you don't get to say "well, that's how our forefathers did it" when you've got the Word sitting right in front of you and you have minds, hearts and lips capable of prayer to ask for wisdom. While every generation stands on the shoulders of the one before (generally speaking) you don't get to blame your line of sight on your thinking that the generation before you were midgets. Your own unwillingness to dig in and establish -- not your own traditions -- but your own expression of faith independent of the generation you learned from will not go unnoticed by the King. This is an ongoing responsibility.

This is an idea that may not be simple to grasp or put energy behind the effort, especially if you've grown up under the tutelage of people who believe in these ideas

strongly and put a lot of energy into delivering on them. It's hard work, requires inspection of and reflection on the "how" of things and a maturity to discern the constant way forward. It requires conversation to drive change. It requires heart work. Without the faith-driven and Spirit-guided work of each generation digging in and examining how they will be ambassadors to the King and defend Gospel truth, it is not possible to then pick up the mantle of teaching. But picking up that mantle is a requirement for each generation because this is the hard truth – every generation must and will pass away. Developing the skills to fulfill that duty is an important part of gaining spiritual maturity.

This is not strictly an exhortation to parents if that isn't clear at this point. It is most obviously applied to them because the children are entrusted to them and in their presence, so putting the words in front of them is a more natural behavior. But we all have a responsibility to encourage and exhort the children around us. Not a duty as in "it takes a village"; that is a perversion of what Asaph teaches us here. Too much ideology and fleshliness is bound up in that philosophy. This is a collective responsibility but not an abrogation of parental duty in favor of some sort of village groupthink. Like every part of our lives there is a balance to strike here.

Asaph gives us all multiple motivations for why to do this work of preparing to and then teaching the younger generations around us

Psa 78:6-7 "That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: 7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:"

- We do the work because we want the generations to know the "sayings of old" as a matter of generational knowledge since we have been given eyes to see and ears to hear and we hope these young people receive the peace that comes with a true knowledge of Christ.
- We teach them as a matter of fact, in the hope that they will teach them to subsequent generations also as a matter of fact.
- We pass on this knowledge in the hope that we become a vessel of truth that causes one of His sheep to hear His voice.
- We bring to remembrance the works of God, both the larger works like His creating all things, the evidence of it in the rising and setting of the sun every day since Day 1, and the smaller things like those miraculous deliverances from the hands of our enemies that are experienced by every generation. Learning about and understanding God's majesty is a knowledge surpassing all others.
- We teach them over and over again, every jot and tittle of His commandments to fulfill our duty to all mankind – which especially includes the children.

Very importantly, teaching our children is not about some position on morality. It isn't about staking our claim in the so-called culture wars. It certainly isn't about anything as mundane and fleshly as legacy. It is about fulfilling our duty to our God and doing what He has instructed. Battling the adversarial words put into the ears of our children by especially these schools is a duty, but consider carefully that it is also a privilege.

When our King gives us a task, it is important to remember that He carefully considered to whom or to what in His creation He was giving it. When Earthly kings delegate tasks it is to execute against their larger strategy for their kingdom. Their subjects seek to serve those purposes, and they do so for the purpose of bringing glory to the realm and their sovereign. Consider how much greater a purpose the Sovereign of all serves with His providence, and all that His wheels accomplish in their turnings. Consider that He had a literally infinite number of options to choose from to preserve His message and have it delivered throughout the human timeline. So when He has chosen to deliver that task to us, we should see it not as a burden but a great privilege to undertake the task and put appropriate energy to it. That is the spirit of this exhortation

Ecc 9:10 *“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”*

We do not work to a slavish rote mentality, trudging to the task with bare minimum energy and attention hoping to just keep ahead of the taskmasters whip. We engage because this is the will and desire of our King and it glorifies Him for us to have our children acting in an ambassadorial way through our teaching, through the sense of accountability to Him we instill in them. We work to teach our children the joy of the Lord so that they will themselves see it, and even if, when they come to years they do not follow in His paths, will have seen it as a matter of practical knowledge.

Finally we engage in this joyful undertaking for the benefit of their adult lives, that when they become the next generation they also know what *not* to do.

Psa 78:8 *“And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”*

Now, you might look at that and say “well, we aren't a stubborn and rebellious generation”, so how would that apply to us” and that would be an excellent question to raise. To that question I say this – can we truly say that? Have we never walked in a way that is stubborn or rebellious? Have we never set a poor example for the young ones around us, both collectively and individually? I only wish it were not so and stand in shame for all the times I can recall in my life where I have been guilty of this.

Pointedly, I don't think we can honestly say that we have *never* been properly described by these words. And while they do primarily apply to the children of Israel (and there is no question these and similar words are frequently applied to them) there is learning here for all generations to absorb. This is the cautionary tale for us and the ultimate reason for why we should invest our time and energy in this endeavor.

There is no qualifier placed here by Asaph. What I mean by that is there is no "right time" for you to engage in teaching a young person some truth. You don't get here by passing a class, there are no "minimum requirements" listed here, no certifications that bring you into the "youth teaching program".

If you have eyes to see, ears to hear this truth, and a heart desirous of following your King, you have what it takes to engage here. This is not the exclusive job of an elder, or an elder's wife any more than it is singularly a parental job. We aren't going to build a "youth ministry" and delegate this duty to a few select people. This is (at least partially) why we don't separate our children from the assembly, because that is a crucial part of this teaching. But if you're exposed to these young people a lot and aren't using that time to show them how to control their spirits and their tongues, to express joy in the Lord, to demonstrate brotherly kindness, to discuss Scripture, etc., you're wasting opportunities. It's not about hosting a youth Bible lesson, remember, it's about our conversation and where we *can* say words, saying them. If you wait until you think you're ready, you're dwelling in your pride because none of us are ever "ready" by our own hands. It is a submissive spirit, calling out to the Holy Spirit for mercy and grace to do the work that drives the results we want here.

I also want to keep in our line of sight that these children are not our own

Psa 127:3 "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

A heritage isn't something that you go acquire as a matter of trade, it's something you receive from a benefactor. It can be an easy thing to forget given how much time we spend tending to them in this life, but it is an important issue to keep in our line of sight. This heritage we have been afforded in the form of children is a great blessing and a great responsibility. And I don't say these things because I think our parents are slacking or do not understand this fundamental issue. It is good to take a step back sometimes and reconsider things we know, to see how we can expand that knowledge and look to apply it more readily. And this time of year is an excellent time to re-focus.

I pray the peace of Jesus Christ enters your hearts and His mercy is bountifully shed upon you and all your endeavors as you go into the world again this week.