

## 5: Households of the New Covenant, Part 3

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### Nurturing the Divine nature

We have been talking about New Covenant households and about nurturing the Divine nature in the home. The role of a father and a mother extends to nurturing the Divine nature in our households.

There are many varying natures of households: there can be one person, an older couple, a younger couple, families and so on. Obviously, a lot of the language we use is towards families, and we can pick up those principles as they apply to our various households. Of course, this overflows to how

we are together in a community of believers and how we are in the church.

This then overflows to how we are in the broader community, because we are one and the same people in every context. We don't nurture the Divine nature in the home and then 'run loose' once we go out of the home. Nor do we gather together on a weekend such as this, and once it's over say: 'Beauty, let's go and live how we see fit'.

We are the embodiment of the New Covenant life. Christ came in the flesh to deliver us so that we would actually have His life in our flesh, the very same life of the Son of God. This is the marvellous mystery and wonder of the work that He has done.

### The Fatherhood of God

We know about the role of fatherhood. We understand the role of our heavenly Father towards us first, which is the pattern for the role of fathers here on earth.

Luke chapter 11 says that even in the natural we acknowledge that a father wants what's best for his children. You're not going to give them a stone if they ask for bread. You're not going to give them a serpent or a snake if they ask for a fish. You're not going to give them a scorpion for an egg.

*"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?"*

*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"* (Luke 11:11-13)

Christ was saying: 'You, being evil or unbelieving, know how to give good gifts to your children. So how much more the Heavenly Father knows how to give good gifts'.

And what is His gift to us? The Holy Spirit. Why? Because of the Everlasting Covenant: He would be our God, we would be His people; He would be our Father, we would be His sons (Ezekiel 37:26-27). This is so that we would share and partake of the life and fellowship of God.

### **Our own way doesn't produce eternal life**

The danger is that in the natural, we're generally going to draw from and rely upon our own experience. That is just how we are wired. All management theory, and everything else like that, runs on the idea that past behaviour is the indicator and the determinant of future behaviour. Whether we've had a negative experience or a positive experience, these experiences are going to feed in to how we moderate our behaviour.

We draw on our own experiences and abilities. Sometimes we can even throw them aside and say: 'I can see what the social norms are and what is expected in the general community, and I will modify my behaviour to be consistent with that'. This could overflow to just trying to get 'a feel' for what is the culture of a Christian community and trying to fit in with that.

But, none of this is actually going to yield fruitfulness to eternal life. Our approach to discipline in this way is really only going to yield compliance with some sort of standard or measure. We will have a standard of

behaviour (and that can be a morally good standard), but it's not going to produce sons of God, which is what the whole purpose of nurturing the Divine nature is for. We have sons of God, and we want them to grow to full maturity; from immaturity to maturity.

### **Our own law**

We have the Spirit of God in us as sons of God, but Christ has to be *formed* in us, and there's a distinction in that. A child's compliance is really just going to be a projection, and in a similar way, any of us who just comply with an expected standard find it is really a projection to avoid the shame that is to do with our measure of what is good and what is evil in terms of our pursuits. It would just be the outcome of being trained to live by the other law in us. We'll get more and more sophisticated in terms of our own law, of how we see things, and what seems right to us. None of this is actually going to nurture the Divine nature in us.

As parents, if we live by the principles of the flesh in this way, we are going to view compliance as the evidence of good family culture. It becomes one measure upon another measure. A good, compliant child will satisfy our need to be verified in this way, and we think that this is a good family culture.

The hallmark of this is that we are often concerned about how we are being perceived by others. This is actually going to be the driving force: 'How are others seeing me? What do they think of me? How am I measuring up?' We are comparing one against the other.

*All* of that is just living by the principles of good and evil. Inevitably, what that develops in the family and in a community of people is a reward for good behaviour, and a bad

consequence or punishment for bad behaviour. This only leads to more bondage to the law of sin. It's just going to keep us more and more bound. Good or evil, reward or punishment, is going to be our motivation. It doesn't matter how good we think those standards are. They could all be based on the principles of the Scripture, but this is still Old Covenant living.

### The veil removed

The law of God is good, holy and just. Paul says:

*"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good...For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin."* (Romans 7:12,14)

For the Israelites, when they kept the Law of God, what was good became a ministry of death because they could not keep all of the law in their own strength. This can be the same for us.

When we are looking at how to nurture the Divine nature, we have to have our eyes clearly opened and the veil removed, so that we can see the fatherhood of God towards us and be joined to that. We can see the love of God in the work of Christ giving His life to gather up all the law of sin and death, so that we would join Him; we would join His offering and suffering, not just as a phrase that rolls off the tongue but as a reality in our lives.

### Love from a pure heart

*"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either*

*what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."* (1 Timothy 1:5-7)

Paul is explaining love in this verse, when he says, 'the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart'. That's the starting point: the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart. It's not compliance. It's not the appearance of a 'together' life of steady relationships. It is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from sincere faith. But then, he says:

*"Some of you have strayed and have turned aside to idle talk. You actually desire to be teachers of the law because you see the law as good."* (1 Timothy 1:6)

These people say: 'I want to be a teacher of that. I want to make sure that I'm actually instructing people in how to keep the law'. But Paul says of them:

*"...they don't understand what they say or the things that they are affirming."* (1 Timothy 1:7)

Why don't they understand? Because they're not doing it by the Spirit of God. This is what we need to be careful of when we're joining the Fatherhood of God to nurture and see the Divine nature grow from the immaturity to maturity. We need to be careful that we're not just parroting the law of God, the principles of Christ, or the principles of the cross as a mechanism to see a good, compliant outcome. We need understanding.

Paul continues:

*"But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers."* (1 Timothy 1:8-9)

All the law did was that it brought a knowledge of sin. We're delivered from this law because all of it was pointing us to Christ, and in living in His way we are not bound by good and evil, or the measure of reward and punishment. His way is a perfect law of liberty, but we know not to misuse our liberty to say: 'I am free from this, so now I can do what I like for an occasion to the flesh.'

### Religious ambition is destructive

We can find, too, that any parent who has an ambition in life, and for one reason or another this has been frustrated, their frustration can flow on where they attempt to realise their ambition through their children. They can think: 'I've missed out on this opportunity, but I'll make sure *you* get that opportunity', or, 'Circumstances in *my* life prevented me from this, so I'll do everything I can to keep that out of your life so that *you* will not be prevented from having that opportunity.'

This culture within a family is destructive, particularly when the parent is attempting to live out their religious aspirations through their children, to see them grow in esteem in a Christian community as though that's going to fulfil something of God's life in the parent. This will lead to thinking that the involvement of our children in the activities of the church is a demonstration, an expression, of the family's righteousness and cultural ministry. We must put off this thought that actually makes whether we serve here, offer there, or do this or that, at face value, a demonstration and expression of self-righteousness to death.

We do know that the Scriptures say you can live by a certain standard and rule of life, don't do this and don't do that, which has an appearance of wisdom but is only false humility (Colossians 2:21). It is not true humility, because in it, you are verifying yourself. It is

feeding your flesh, but you are actually missing the mark, even though outwardly you have the appearance of holiness, just as Paul wrote:

*"These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."* (Colossians 2:23)

Remember, the Pharisees were whitewashed sepulchres; whitewashed tombs. They were clean on the outside and had the appearance of holiness and godliness, but they were full of dead men's bones inside. There was no life of God in them, yet they were experts in the law: experts in the ways of God, but only on the page and in the letter of the law (Matthew 23:27).

Any self-centred mode is only going to teach us to measure the word of God against our understandings and our own cultural standards within our families. It will actually war against the mechanism of trusting God's messengers and giving ourselves, one with the other, children with the parents, to true fellowship and offering in the body of Christ.

### Parents receive the discipline of the Lord

The fundamental foundation for raising children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord is firstly for the parents themselves to be receiving the discipline and instruction of the Lord in the fellowship of Christ's offering and circumcision.

As parents, our first priority is not, as we would think, to train up our children. Our first priority is to actually make sure that our life is ordered aright; that we are in submission to the word of the Father. Our priority is to make sure that we are disciples of Christ; that we are availing ourselves of the work of Christ's

offering and circumcision; that we are having our hearts circumcised.

Then, from that understanding, we are able to nurture and train up our children in the same way so that they can say, 'See our faith, and the outcome and fruit of our conduct, and follow in that'. They can see the outcome and the fruit of the conduct of others of faith and follow that (Hebrews 13:7).

In this kind of fellowship, parents are being delivered from their fleshly propensities, including any of their earthly and worldly approaches to discipline, and being filled with the love of God and the life of Christ, because we are joined to Christ's offering and circumcision. Because of that, we are able to join our children to the same offering and fellowship.

This is walking in the Spirit, and now, all our engagement with our children is going to be based on the love of God, which is poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit.

### Led by the Spirit

We continue to walk in the Spirit each day. The only way to train up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is to be led by the Spirit on a daily basis; on an hourly basis, minute by minute and even second by second! You are led by the Spirit, and it is not an overly spiritual or religious fog of an experience. It is a true reality that as we set our minds on Him, the Lord is directing us and leading every step.

We seek spiritual wisdom through prayer and through fellowship for the sake of sanctification: our sanctification and our children's sanctification. We honour the fact that God is the Father of our children's spirits. God has the priority of Fatherhood over our

children. This is in stark contrast to the fleshly approach to raising children, where the parents are more concerned about what their children's behaviour actually says about themselves.

Now, a spiritual father is going to understand that he is training his children up in the ways of the Lord according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He wants to see them grow as sons of God so that they are fully equipped to do the works of their sonship. He wants to see each one grow to their fullness of maturity as a son of God; until they come, as the Scripture says:

*"...to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:13)

That is the maturity to which we are *all* being formed: Christ is being formed in us, until we attain to that measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, full of grace and truth. A mature son of God will walk in the light of true fellowship by the Spirit of God.

### Walking in ignorance

Now, the alternative to this is going to be a son of man who, as the Scripture says:

*"walks, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."* (Ephesians 4:17-19)

When it's stated like that, it's quite stark. No one is going to set out saying, 'I think I'll bring my children up in the futility of their mind,

having their minds darkened and alienated from God'. I don't think *anyone* would say, 'Yes, that's my goal for my family.' But what happens is the result of the deception of blindness. When we pursue what seems right in our own eyes, we do not realize that we have no understanding of the ways of the Lord.

We need to see that veil removed so that we have understanding, and we have the knowledge of God. Otherwise, it's clearly set out in the Scriptures that futility, alienation, blindness and uncleanness will be the result, the fruit, of walking in ignorance (Ephesians 4:17-19).

### Training and admonition of the Lord

We know that the Scriptures have a lot of instruction for families, and we can read all of these.

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:1-4)

This training and admonition of the Lord is the discipline of God the Father, which conforms a child to their name and to the works of faith that belong to their righteousness as a Son of God.

The Father's discipline is the circumcision of Christ. Remember that before a child is in the womb they are known by God. Before they are born they are sanctified to the work of their name. They are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are filled with the Spirit of the Son and filled with the Spirit of the Father. They are born

again. They are spiritual sons of God when we first meet them. Isn't that an amazing thing!

This training and admonition, then, is connecting them to the discipline of the Father who is aligning them to everything that they are named and sanctified to be. So, it's quite an accountability that we have: to have eyes to see what is that sanctification. We won't get that sight all at once.

### Chastening

The starting point for discipline is not a set of rules or standards, or even an expectation. Rather, it is understanding how and why God the Father disciplines. Remember, He disciplines according to His Eternal Covenant purpose, which is that we will be His sons and partake of His life in its fullness.

The Scriptures exhort us not to forget 'the exhortation which speaks to us as sons' (Hebrews 12:5):

*"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* (Hebrews 12:5-6)

I would like to think that the chastening of the Lord is not a punitive action. It is a purification; it's a sanctifying work. That's the whole heart of God's love towards us. It is the chastening to bring us to be sanctified sons of God.

*"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons."* (Hebrews 12:7-8)

If you're without chastening, you're fatherless; you're not connected to the Father in heaven. Paul said:

*"...we had human fathers who corrected us and we respected them. Shouldn't we more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?"* (Hebrews 12:9)

If you can be obedient to your natural father, how much more should you be obedient to the Heavenly Father?

*"Our earthly fathers indeed chastened us for a few days as it seemed best to them but God chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness, acknowledging that no chastening is joyful for the present but painful nevertheless it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who will be trained by it".* (Hebrews 12:10-11)

So, as parents, we should have this mind.

## Ministers of the New Covenant

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says:

*"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

Isn't that a marvellous mandate for parents? That we can come, not thinking that we have all the answers for our children, or that we are sufficient of ourselves. We don't give them the Spirit of God. They have received the Spirit of God as a gift from God. Yet we are nurturing and training; we are ministers of the New Covenant, which is why we spent so much time looking at what the New Covenant is, and

the Everlasting Covenant, and the Old Covenant. We are ministers of the New Covenant, by the Spirit.

## Our minds renewed

If we will give ourselves willingly - parents, children and all of us - to be trained and disciplined, we will be aligned to the will of God which we know is our sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Our minds and the thoughts and intents of our hearts will be renewed and transformed to a way that is not the popular way, or the 'normal' way (however 'normal' is defined at the time).

We know that Paul beseeched the Roman Church:

*"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:1-2)

Why did Paul say, 'Do not be conformed to the world?' So that we can be transformed by the renewing of our mind to prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. So, we can reject the popular, or the 'normal' view and way.

As we do this, our lives will be lives of continual repentance. We're not saying that we're constantly going the wrong way and we have to keep turning back, or that we keep getting things wrong and going back to the ways of the Lord. Rather, that by our lives of continual repentance, we will be ones that are eagerly seeking to know and to do the will of God. We won't be turning away from the face of Christ, into whose image we are being

transformed by the Spirit of God. We will continually be turning to the Lord. We can receive a word, and we can turn to the Lord. And what happens when we turn to the Lord? The veil is removed. The blindness is removed. The veil that prevents us from understanding the ways of the Lord is removed.

We also note, in saying this, that repentance is not something that's entirely up to us. God grants us the power to turn from our own ways when we are powerless to do so; regardless of how much we might strive to do so.

### His strength and His work in us

We can't just endeavour to live this way by our own strength, and there will be things that hinder us. We all know about the other law, but don't just generically blame the other law for everything, saying: 'It's the other law in me. It's the other law in him, or the other law in my children', so that the other law becomes the faceless bad guy.

As we walk by the Spirit we should be able, as the veil is removed, to identify specifically what is hindering us in our walk as a son of God. And by the power of God, by the power of the Spirit, we can put off our learned responses, our default mechanisms that we pass on to our children. We can, by the grace and mercy of God, be delivered to a better way, free from condemnation and shame, and we can do this through prayer by the Spirit of God.

We're not going to find this deliverance by fault finding, or by pointing the finger, saying, 'You've just got to do *this*, and you've just got to be better at *that*'. Rather, we present ourselves in fellowship. Having joined the offering and sufferings of Christ through baptism, believing and obeying from the heart

the word of God, He does the work in us. *He* is the one that circumcises our hearts. We cannot fix ourselves. This work of removing our fleshly ways is the circumcision of our hearts.

### Nurture the Divine nature in our homes

The Divine nature in the home is nurtured and fostered through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ as we join the offering of Christ. Later, we will be studying the stations of the cross, and we will need to understand the work that each of these elements is doing, but we can't just look at them and make them into some mechanistic or religious pursuit. We nurture the Divine nature by growing up in the fellowship of prayer, being strengthened by Eternal Spirit, as Christ was in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed (Hebrews 9:14). This should be our testimony, as Paul wrote to the Romans:

*"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. ... if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."*  
(Romans 8:9, 11)

Nurturing the Divine nature in our children will be through talking; through regular and easy dialogue. A two-way conversation, both listening and asking questions, which was what Christ was doing at the age of twelve (Luke 2:46). Training and admonition will never accomplish the righteousness of God if it's coming from the basis of some reactive prohibition: 'Don't do this, don't do that', or if it springs from frustration or from anxiety. None of these things will produce the righteousness of God.



As fathers and mothers give themselves to join the Fatherhood of God towards their children, we begin to nurture the Divine nature in them, in our homes, as we seek the Lord for His will for each one, then we train and nurture according to that mandate in the Lord. We know, as Paul knew and wrote to the Corinthians:

*“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God... your bodies are members of Christ... he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him... your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own.”* (1 Corinthians 6:11,15,19)

### **The story of Manoah and his wife**

I recommend that you read Judges chapter 13. This is about Manoah, his wife and Samson. Look at the interactions - how the angel of the Lord came and spoke to Manoah's wife and she didn't draw it to herself. She ran, and she spoke to her husband. Manoah had a few questions, so he prayed, and he said:

*“Let this messenger of God come and teach us again what we shall do for our child...”* (Judges 13:8)

And God heard the voice of Manoah, and the angel came back, but he came back to the woman, Manoah's wife. Manoah wasn't with her, so she ran and told him, and he came back with her to the angel and they had a discussion. The outcome was that they received the mandate for the rule of life for Samson to be brought up in their house, and then they offered to the Lord.

The amazing thing is that, when they offered, the angel didn't just sort of walk off or disappear - he went up in the flame of the altar. A pretty dramatic exit! At which point,

Manoah said, 'Oh no! We're going to die. We've seen God!' But thankfully, his wife said, 'No, if that was going to happen we'd already be dead!'

We can trust that this is the word of the Lord to us. We know from the account in Judges that Samson grew up to a full accountability as an adult, having kept the vow.

### **Grace for our households**

We can find grace in our households as New Covenant households. We can inquire of the Lord. The Lord can lead us, and we can bring up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord, according to the purpose of the Lord and according to the naming and sanctification of the Lord.

As we are under the headship of Christ in our household, this grace will come. We accept that our child is born again from the womb, and the Fatherhood of God takes priority over *our* fatherhood and motherhood. As we apply ourselves to live as New Covenant households and to nurture the Divine nature in our homes, the fruit will be sons of God who are sanctified and secure.

Paul wrote about the character of sons of God, the character of the new man:

*“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

*But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in*

*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”*  
(Colossians 3: 12-16)

When I think of teaching and admonishing in the nurture and training of the Lord by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, I don't immediately think of this or that chorus or hymn. I immediately think of the song of Moses, the song of Mary and the song of Hannah (Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32; Luke 1:46-55; 1 Samuel 2:1-10). Look all of these up and read them. These were the songs that taught of the ways of the Lord; songs that declared, 'This is the blessing of Abraham to our family. This is the deliverance of the Lord'.

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* (Colossians 3: 16)

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