

A Testimony and Law

It is tempting to leave tasks to others, or at least hope someone else will do them. That is especially the case when boring routine chores need to be done. It is also the case when we do not like a job or feel ill-equipped to do it.

Neglect

There was a time, not that long ago, when it was popular to send children to Sunday School. The parents or carers, however, did not attend church themselves. Some did this so they could have time to themselves. Others did it because it was what others did.

Whatever the reason, the practice begs important questions. Just who is responsible to teach children? What do the duties of parents include?

Psalm 78 provides an answer.

The author begins with a plea. He wants the people to listen. 'Give ear', he says in verse 1. But give ear to what? To his teaching. To what teaching? To teaching about 'the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done' (*verse 4*).

The Psalmist then talks about a testimony, a law (*verse 5*). He describes it as 'established' and 'appointed' by God. Furthermore he insists it was given to God's people. What does God tell his people to do?

In a word, God says it is our duty to teach the next generation about him, his wonders and his works. The mention of 'fathers' in verse 5 implies this task is to be undertaken especially, but not exclusively, by men. It is not to be left to mothers or the female members of the church. In each household the husband and father is to take the lead to fulfil this God-given duty.

How tragic that too many over too many years have neglected this wonderful responsibility. It is true, as indicated above, that the duty has sometimes been given to others (*for example* school, Sunday school, or young people's meetings). But to abrogate a duty is to neglect it.

Norm

The Psalmist indicates that church and home life are to be characterised by a passionate concern that the next generations are taught well. The Secretary of State for Education is eager to see high standards of literacy and numeracy. He does not want to see them fall. He wants them to be consistently amongst the best in the world. We applaud such zeal.

Is such zeal to be seen in God's people? Are we passionate about the level of understanding and knowledge young people have of God?

Please, let us be clear. We are not to make known our thoughts or ideas about God. It is not the musings of men that matter. The substance of our conversation is to be the deeds and wonders of God. We are to speak of his work as Creator. We are to make known the way he has done wonders for the good of his people. How he cared for our fathers during times of hardship and persecution. How he provides for us each day. How he delights to hear us praise and pray. How he is always true to his promises. Above all he wants us to make known how he so loves the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.

Why does he want us to do this? Because faith comes through hearing. We exist to declare the excellencies of him who called us from darkness into his marvellous light (*1 Peter 2.9*). As we do our duty we shall see some, even many, put their trust in God.

That is the Psalmist's concern.

He wants to see the young 'set their hope in God' (*verse 7*). He does not want them to 'forget' God's works or neglect his commands. He does not want them to prove rebellious, stubborn or faithless (*verse 8*). Rather he wants them to know that God tenderly shepherds his people and guides them with his skilful hand (*verse 72*).

How great is the God we adore!