



## Preserving a Family Tradition

*"When I was a boy in my father's house ... he taught me and said, 'Lay hold of my words with all your heart, keep my commands and you will live'."*

Proverbs 4:3-4

According to the dictionary, *"tradition"* means *"the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation."* Our traditions are long-established customs or beliefs that have been passed on in this way. What should we think about *"traditions"*? Is *"tradition"* a negative concept, or is there a way we can think of tradition, and uphold tradition, in a way that honours God and his Word?

Scripture teaches that there are two kinds of tradition. First, there's human tradition, the tradition of men. That's the *"accepted wisdom"* that's passed on without a real understanding of its reasoning, and with no basis in God's Word.

But there's a second kind of tradition, one that we receive from God's Word. This kind of tradition plays an important role in the life of God's people. We are commanded to pass down our faith in our Creator and Saviour, from generation to generation. This is a defining characteristic of who we are as God's covenant people. Our God claims our children as his own, and commands us to bring up our children to serve him as well.

In Proverbs 4:3-4 we see how the way of wisdom must be passed on. A faithful grandfather's teaching is being passed on to a grandchild, by means of a man who speaks both as a son and as a father. The father begins by saying, *"Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding"* (v. 1). But then the father goes back in time to his own childhood, to the words of *his* father: *"When I was a boy in my father's house ... he taught me"* (v. 3-4). What the grandfather taught the father is the same thing that the father is teaching his own son: Embrace wisdom, and you will receive a crown of splendour.

The LORD has made promises to us and to our children, and he is faithful to fulfil those promises. But he uses means to fulfil them – it doesn't happen automatically! The third question that parents answer when they present their children for baptism makes this very clear: *"Do you promise, as father and mother, to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he is able to understand, and to have him instructed therein to the utmost of your power?"*

It's about passing on the tradition, the tradition received from God himself in his Word. It's about fathers remembering the teaching of their fathers and passing that teaching on to their own children. This is the primary means by which God cares for and grows his church. God's ordinary means of working is through the generations, through covenant succession, with the children picking up where their parents left off.

If we want to be witnesses to God's grace and goodness, the most important place where that must be done is at home: in our living rooms, around our dinner tables, in our kitchens, our bedrooms, and our backyards. And in giving reasons for our tradition, in explaining *why* we do the things that we do, we fulfil our calling to perpetuate the covenant people of God from generation to generation. Passing on the tradition means continuing with a cycle that is good, so that our children can by God's grace continue to do the same.

As God's covenant children, and as covenant parents, our most important task is to train up our children in the way they should go. Let our children be able to say to their own children one day,

*"When I was a boy in my father's house, he taught me and said, 'Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.'"*

Our God is faithful to his promises. We can trust that he will bless our efforts, with all their weakness, if we faithfully bring his Word to our children in our teaching and in our example. If we obey him and train up our children in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it. So speak about God's grace and love, about his hatred of sin and his love for his people. Teach your children the way of wisdom. Lead them in paths of uprightness. Teach them to keep hold of your instruction, and never let go – to guard wisdom, for in wisdom there is life. And then trust that the Lord will set a garland of grace on their head, and present them with a crown of splendour.

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