

1 Oculi – Luke 11

Those who accused Jesus of using the devil to cast out demons were also those who thought they had their houses in order. They figured that they had raised their children well. But Jesus pointed out that their own children were casting out demons. He was referring to those seventy disciples whom he sent out in the previous chapter. They proclaimed the arrival of God's kingdom. They healed diseases, and even the demons were subject to them when they declared the name of Jesus. These were Israelites, likely raised with a biblical education, learning the Law of Moses, God's acts of salvation to his ancient people, and the words of the prophets. Their parents brought them to the synagogue to learn all of this from the Bible. In this sense, they certainly did have a good upbringing. Their houses were in order.

But it doesn't matter how well you have groomed your children if you are not holding onto what the Scriptures actually teach. You can learn history and good morals. But if you forget the need to repent of your sins and you lose sight of your need for Christ who came to save you from your sins, then your vast knowledge of true things will leave you completely defenseless. You can have your house swept and put in order. But the evils spirit that was driven out by God's Word will just come back with seven even more wicked spirits.

Jesus is speaking to those whose houses are seemingly in order, who have a religious culture and a decent knowledge of biblical facts. In light of the fact that fewer and fewer children are growing up with a basic grasp of biblical doctrine or even Bible stories, we need to ask ourselves this question. Are we raising our children with the knowledge of Scripture, or do we make excuses that we don't have the time? We simply can't take these things for granted, as if someone else is going to pick up the slack, or as if sending them to VBS for a few days a year, Sunday School occasionally, or a few years of Wednesday School are going to guard them from the temptations of the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

There is nothing more valuable than a Christian education. A kid who knows the Bible stories and can recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer already has a fantastic education. But what good is a topnotch education if you don't continue to make use of God's Word? When the temptation to deny your faith, give into your carnal desires, and go along with the unbelieving mob become too difficult to bear, it doesn't matter how well you think you have kept your house clean. You need the Holy Spirit constantly in your life warding off the evil spirits. And the Holy Spirit works through the Word.

This is why Jesus responds the way he does to that woman in the crowd. She gave high praises to the mother of our Lord Blessed is the womb that gave birth to you and the breasts that nursed you. Blessed indeed! Mary was a good mother. But what made Mary especially blessed was that she believed the promise of her Lord. She said, "Let it be to me according to you Word." She gave birth to God in the flesh, but it was the Word of God that sustained her in the faith and protected her from every attack of Satan.

When we teach our children God's Word, we are doing much more than simply keeping a well ordered home. We are giving our children the armor of Christ to withstand the devil's temptations. We are preparing them to bear their crosses, to suffer the hostility of the world, and to face their death with courage.

2 Oculi – Luke 11

Of course, we want our children to behave. We don't want them to fall into this or that immoral habit, because it never ends well. Too many homes have been divided because mom or dad neglected the commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Too many children fall into sinful and even deadly behavior, because they ignored the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long on the earth." But if all we are doing is teaching our children to behave, then we are ignoring the greater danger. If the goal is simply to give them a safe, comfortable life with little conflict, then this might prepare them for a middle class life in modern America. But will it prepare them to face the forces of the old evil foe?

The Word of God prepares us for conflict. Yes, it teaches us to live at peace with all people as much as it depends on us. But it also teaches us not to conform to the world. And the world doesn't like it when we don't conform. The world wants peace, but they don't want the cross of Jesus, which alone gives us eternal peace with God. The gospel doesn't conform to the sentiments of the world. It proclaims forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ alone. It reveals the kingdom of heaven in God's Son who claimed his throne by giving himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. The gospel alone claims the right to rule our hearts and minds, and it won't share that honor with any worldly opinions, no matter how neat and tidy they present themselves.

The world wants order. It wants peace. But it seeks this not by repentance and faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ. Instead, it achieves order and peace by adopting some form of moral teaching. They always water it down to fit the sentiments of the world around them. Even those who call themselves conservative often loosen up on their stances against abortion, homosexuality, and other so called social issues, because they see these as "losing issues." They might glitter it over with some religion. They might even call it Christian. But the goal is always to avoid as much pain as possible in this life.

Yet, Jesus doesn't teach us how to win social wars in the culture. Of course, his Word often does win over cultures when people freely confess his truth. We should thank God when this happens and pray that it would happen more. After all, he wants to make disciples of all nations. But he does not do so by compromising with some moral, religious majority. No, our Lord teaches us to prepare for death. Let the little children come to me, he says. Where do they follow him? To the cross. To his death. It was there where he shed his blood for them, took away their sin, their guilt, and all the weapons the devil uses against them. It was there where he sealed their peace with God.

So when your children learn to bear the crosses God places upon them, then he directs them again and again to find their refuge in the cross of Jesus. They find refuge in their baptism where they were crucified with Christ and died to all sins. When they are being tempted, they find refuge in the body and blood of Christ given and shed for them for the forgiveness of their sins. When their faith is going through a crisis and they struggle with doubts, then they find refuge in the empty tomb, which proves that Jesus is the Son of God who has reconciled us to the Father forever. If you are raising your children with this certainty from the gospel, then you are giving them much more than merely well-ordered lives. You are arming them with the full armor of God.

3 Oculi – Luke 11

The people who accused Jesus of casting out demons with the help of Beelzebub thought that they had given their children a well ordered life with an education in God's Word. And I'm sure they did. But they neglected to take seriously the main thing God's Word teaches. God's Word teaches about the Redeemer, the Savior, the Servant of the Lord who came to give his life as a ransom for sin, to crush the head of Satan while being bruised in his heel. The Bible, with all its ceremonies and codes, is all about God providing atonement for our sins by the shedding of blood. It's all about his promise of life that transcends this earthly life. The Bible teaches that God gives and that God takes away. The Bible teaches us to deny ourselves, to fear God, and to trust him even in the midst of suffering and loss. The Bible doesn't direct us to an earthly kingdom or our own righteousness. No, it presents the righteousness of the Lord as our only hope and salvation. The Bible prepares us to face the father of lies who seeks to snatch the hope of salvation out of our hearts. These fathers made sure their sons learned the Bible. They brought them to the synagogue. Yet, all the while, they themselves did not pay attention to what the Bible was teaching.

But Jesus says that these sons would be their fathers' judges. This is because the sons listened to the Word they were taught. Despite their fathers complaining about this new Teacher, they recognized it as the teaching of God himself. With ears of faith, they heard their Savior and knew his voice. They took refuge in his salvation. They held onto his words. And as Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

Children need strong fathers. Fathers need us to stand up for what is right and set a good example. But if you rely on your own strength, then you are doing a disservice to your family. Jesus is the stronger man who overcomes the strength of the devil. He overcame him by bearing our sin and reconciling us to the Father. He declares us righteous before God, giving us faith to believe it with confidence from his Holy Spirit. By taking away our sin and guilt, he has stripped the devil bare of any ammunition he might use against us. He divides the plunder, giving us a share in his kingdom. This is what all of us, fathers, mothers, and children alike, need to learn. The Word of our Savior is the only thing that will prepare us to face the devil and his attacks.

The devil wants to take our faith out of our hearts. He does this first by taking our confession out of our mouths. If he can get us to remain silent, then he can starve our faith altogether. But our Lord teaches us to confess his Word. Don't be afraid to talk about sin and God's judgment, or to speak against whatever popular error is being promoted. Speak freely with your children and your loved ones of Christ who bore our sin, satisfied God's wrath, and defeated the devil. The Scriptures give you the courage and the wisdom to speak. It is God's living Word, after all. It is the finger of God. When we hear it, believe it, and confess it, then we can know that the Holy Spirit is at work and that God's kingdom has come among us. Amen.