

TODAY'S CHILD, TOMORROW'S MAN

The biblical exhortation that sin is passed from parents to child, serves to exhort and stir up passions about the spiritual welfare of our children. Yet many parents, in light of this belief, stand back and count on grace to bring about change. They cry, "Grace, grace, give me more grace." We so seldom hear today, "Righteousness, righteousness, help me make them more righteous."

Our spiritual Forefathers had not so learned Christ in such a way to falsely assume that our Christianity was relegated solely to our assemblies of public worship. On the contrary, they behaved with such piety in their private homes, that on occasion the Apostle Paul referred to their families as 'the Church'. "Salute such a one", he says "and the church which is in his house", (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15). Yet such piety in the home today is mocked. Yes, within the church it is mocked. In my field of endeavour I visit families, going from house to house, church to church, only to understand with greater empathy the words of Abraham to Abimelech when he says, "Surely, the fear of God is not in this place" (Genesis 20:11). I go to homes where the words of Joshua are enshrined on great plaques of glory, "For me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But I observe the children and come away asking, "Who is this Lord they serve?"

I will, therefore, as plainly and seriously as I can, endeavour to convince the reader of three duties of parenthood. Each of these duties is fashioned by a goal - eternal, moral, and personal. I would like you know: **1) the importance of securing your child's salvation; 2) how to train him in the ethics of Christ; 3) the relational goal of your parenting.**

1. God breathed life into man and he became a living being (Genesis 2:7). It is sobering to ponder the reality that through Adam's seed, at conception, that same breath of life has now become our passage into eternity. Now that your child is part of eternity, does he know the Savoir? Many parents today express concern about the welfare of their children. They serve the healthy meals, encourage proper rest, and insist on dental care and eye examinations. They wrap their lives around the happiness of their progeny. Indeed, parents and grandparents seldom forget to provide for their children's bodies, or make the way right for their happiness, but these same parents too often neglect the most important part of the child's life - securing their child's salvation.



The ministry of reconciliation is the first duty of parents (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). What should motivate them to faithfully discharge their duties? They have an appointment to keep with God, to give an account for the resource of life with which God entrusted them. I desire my children to know Jesus Christ and know Him as their Savoir. How wretched is this age, for we are lulled into thinking that tomorrow is the good day of salvation. Yet, "You fool, tonight your soul is required of you" (Luke 12:20), "...for today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Is there a way we can secure our children's salvation by our good works? Can there be salvation apart from regeneration?

We know in the last days there will be those who "hold to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5a). Jesus warned against the false assumption that you can become godly through training. He spoke against the righteousness found in those who trust in

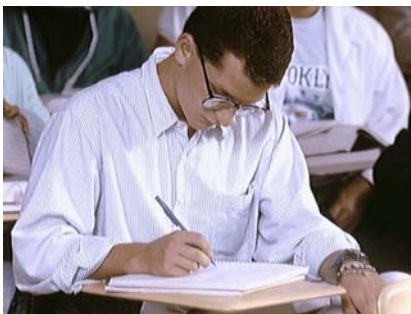
themselves as being positionally righteous, or justified because of their moral accomplishments (Matthew 23:28; Luke 16:15, 18:9). He taught that the truly justified (i.e., the godly) are those who acknowledge their sin and trust in God for forgiveness and His righteousness (John 14:6; Matthew 23:27-28; Luke 18:9-14; Romans 3:23, 27-28). Apart from regeneration, the fullness and purpose of life will always be in doubt, and both motive and reality of righteousness are always in question. Positionally speaking, becoming godly is a personal decision, not a parental one. The concern for our children is that they set their hope on God. The framework of our theology increases, not decreases, our sense of parental responsibility toward that end. When the earth is no more, the heavens are rolled away, and the universe dissolved, where will your child be?

2. The moral goal is to train them in the ethics of Christ. The duty, hope, and goal of Christian parents is to raise a morally responsible child who comes to salvation in Jesus Christ, who's life is governed by the precepts of Christ, and one who reflects the love of Christ. To our shame, we the twentieth century church, have done well as a people to raise children who are moral on the outside, but not moral on the inside (Matthew 23:27). Our children know how to act out the Christian life, but not live in its' reality. We are very good at telling our children what to do, but we fall weak kneed for the lack of knowledge when it comes to telling them why they should do it. That distinction must be emphasized because, knowing how to do right and knowing why to do right, are two distinctly different things. The first speaks to moral action; the second speaks to moral principle.

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Many Christian parents are more preoccupied with suppressing evil in their children than elevating good. That is, when teaching moral principles, these parents will tell their children what is wrong, and what not to do, rather than what is right and why they should do it. This type of training leads to serious moral compromise in the future. The child is trained to the letter of the law, and not the principles of the law. Since so much emphasis is placed on what to avoid, and too little on what to do, the path to virtuous deeds is left highly undefined for the child.



Moral training in the Christian home should equate to training in biblical virtues and values. Why should parents teach their children Christian values? First and foremost, Christian values reflect the person of Christ (John 13:34-35). Such values arouse within a child a consciousness of God and eternity. The natural world is revealed to us through our senses. The spiritual world is revealed to us through revelation and faith, and the heavenly values that reflect both.

Second, because biblical values are other-oriented, a child trained in such is bathed in 'otherness sensitivity' - a prerequisite for healthy and enduring relationships. Jesus was other-oriented, and set the ethical standard for the "one-another" admonitions of Scripture. Biblical values produce the moral mandate of Scripture that requires a 'love God, love your neighbour' sensitivity (Mark 12:28-31). Third, when God's values are allowed to dwell in you richly, the world takes notice. A desperate society will still be watching the Christian message a long time after it stops listening to it.

In a society where natural family relationships are being destroyed, we the church have the greatest opportunity to offer hope by our good behaviour (Matthew 5:16b). When we continue to keep our behaviour pure, when we let our light shine, in our marriages, children, families, when we let the excellencies of Christ be seen in our members, our conduct will not go unnoticed. The compelling testimony of the reality of our faith, and the reality of the gospel, will stand in dramatic contrast to the visitation of the consequences in their own life (1 Peter 2:12). As a result, there will be some that will glorify God by accepting the gospel that we lived before them.

3. Now we come to our personal goal, our children's earthly friendship. There is a course that I suggest parents follow to secure their child's friendship, a course that is contrary to the wisdom of this day, yet a sure way, set in motion by Jesus himself. Pity on the many parents who spend their early years hoping to secure the child's friendship by suspending the requirement of obedience, the mandates of honour, and the commission of otherness. For in the end, misery, not friendship, besets them.

From a parenting perspective, what can sound more noble, or more captivating than a family made up of friends? Certainly that is an admirable idea, even appealing to a generation that may have wondered about the absence of friendship with their own parents. But is it right? Building a friendship with your child must be the relational goal, not the starting point of your parenting. As stewards of God's special gifts, He calls us to a disciplining relationship with our children - bringing them from innocence and foolishness to maturity and wisdom (Proverbs 4:1-7). That is the model our Lord gave His disciples: "No longer do I call you servants (disciples), for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15).



What a pointed illustration of the passing on of wisdom from one to another! In His final hours, Jesus summarized His relationship with the men with whom He had been most intimate, His disciples. From the early days of gathering His men right up to the Last Supper, our Lord continually passed on His wisdom to His disciples. Throughout the process, He was not afraid to remind them that the student is not greater than the teacher. As their shepherd, He brought conformity into their thinking by creating a like-mindedness and direction for life. In John 15, the Lord brought the disciplining of His men to completion and entered into a new relationship with them, one He called friendship.

Christian parenting follows the same pattern of discipleship. From the beginning, we should be passing on the wisdom of the Father to those entrusted to our care. There will be plenty of time for friendship later, and when parents disciple their children wisely, plenty of reason for it. But friendship with our children is not the starting point of our parenting - it is the goal. Only when we have brought our children to a common like-mindedness (Philippians 2:1-5), of who we are as a family, will we be in a position to enjoy our children and give them a reason to enjoy us. Just as it was with the Lord and His disciples, it should also be with us and our children, a discipleship relationship culminating in friendship.

To obtain for our children the spiritual and saving blessings comprised in the gracious promises of God's Word, we the governors of their souls must believe and be faithfully obedient to the Revelation. Without faith, we have no title to any blessings of promise. Without obedience, we cannot expect the favour of God and the communication of His grace on our children, or on our efforts.

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