

COLOSSIANS
Fathers And Children
Colossians 3:21, Ephesians 6:4

INTRODUCTION

Did you know Italy is one of the countries in the world with the lowest rate of juvenile delinquency? A judge from the USA went to Italy to discover why there was such a low juvenile delinquency rate. When he arrived back in the States his report was very simple. He said, "We can cure juvenile delinquency in the USA by nine words - "Put the father back as head of the home."

Max Lerner said, "The vanishing father is perhaps the central act of the changing American family structure. His virtual disappearance holds important consequences for his wife and daughters, but I believe the most critical impact is upon the sons... He sees his family only at the end of an exhausting day, on weekends, or between business trips... He is no longer the source of authority for the family... This distorted emotional structure may give us a clue to the problems of violence in our culture."

FATHERS ARE THE KEY TO DISCIPLINE (6:4a): *Fathers*

This command is to fathers. What kind of fathers? Christian fathers. Those who accept the Lordship of Christ over their lives. Christian fathers seek to obey the scriptures. We have seen that the key to a successful marriage is the husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church, and the key to a successful family is the father. The primary responsibility for training and instruction of children belongs to the father. This verse deals with the disciplining of children as well as the training of children.

If a man rationalizes away this responsibility in the home by saying, "I'm gone a lot" or "I'm very busy; therefore I turn over the raising and disciplining of the children to my wife," he is on shaky ground. God says the father is the leader of the home. He is the leader in love, in discipline, in example and in spiritual motivation.

In the Parade Magazine a few years ago an article entitled, "The Importance of Being Dad" showed the significant role the father plays in the normal growth of a child. It stated that the father: 1) influences the child so there is less delinquency; 2) effects the child's I.Q.; 3) sets a pattern for the child's mental health; 4) is essential for the emotional and feminine development of a daughter; and 5) is essential for the emotional and masculine development of a son.

But God says the father is also responsible for the spiritual welfare of his children. Fathers, when was the last time you had a long talk with your daughter about spiritual things or knelt along side your son to pray?

It is interesting that the Greek word “fathers” is translated “parents” in Hebrews 11:23: ***“By faith Moses’s parents (fathers) hid him for three months...”*** The training and disciplining of children is the responsibility of both the father and the mother, but the ultimate responsibility rests with the father. The father may delegate responsibility to the mother to raise the children but the final court of appeal is the father and it is he who must stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ and give an account for his children. Fathers set the policy and mothers enforce it. There is nothing more dishonoring to the Christian home than fathers who say, “It is my job to make a living and provide for the kids, but it is my wife’s job to raise the children.” Surely both mother and father must be united in their raising of kids or havoc will be created in the home.

Columbia University made a survey and concluded that 53% of the impact upon a child’s life comes from the home. They also concluded that the person who made the greatest impact in the home was the father. Also the most impressive factor in the molding of a child in the home was the conversation of the father at the supper table.

Again I want to stress the mother has a very important role with the children. In terms of time spent with kids, a mother spends more time than the father, so she will have a great influence over them. Augustine, John Newton and John Wesley all were heavily influenced by their mothers. John Wesley said of his mother Suzanna, who had 19 children, “I cannot remember ever having kept back a doubt from my mother. She was the only heart to whom I went in absolute confidence from babyhood until death was upon me.” The rearing of children, however, is a cooperative effort of parents with the final accountability resting with the father.

An English woman said to her child, “Son, your father and I have trained you in righteousness. We have taught you the Word of God. We have lived godly lives before you. If you do not live a godly life, we will stand before God on the day of judgment and bear witness against you.” That child later trusted Christ and became one of the world’s great preachers. Who was he? Charles Haddon Spurgeon!

Fathers and parents should be very careful not to shift the blame from themselves to something or someone else when the children do not turn out as they hoped they would. If children become wayward, be careful not to say, “What’s wrong with our church?” or “What’s wrong with the preacher, or elders or Sunday school teacher?” Or even more realistic it might be said, “How come that Youth Minister can’t shape up our kids?” What parents really need to do is sit down and do some real soul searching and seek to do what is biblically right.

When our son Mark went through two very rebellious teenage years, Carol and I became very frustrated. We wanted to strike out at our son. We wanted to shake him and shape him up. We became very angry with his behavior. When we came to the end of our rope, we asked God what to do. The answer we both got was to get off our sons back, pray for him and shape up our own lives for Christ. We could not change Mark's life but we could change our own, and by God's grace we did it.

FATHERS ARE NOT TO ABUSE AUTHORITY IN DISCIPLINE (6:4b): ***Do not exasperate your children;***

The KJB says, "***Do not provoke your children to wrath.***" The Living Letters says, "***Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful.***" The Phillips Translation says, "***Don't over-correct your children.***" A mother is most apt to spoil the children by over indulgence but the father, who is the disciplinarian, is most likely to abuse this authority so as to produce resentment and bitterness in the child.

The word "exasperate" does not connote minor irritation or a temporary upset, for obviously in a home where proper discipline is administered, a child may become angry. The word "exasperate" means "anger which results in rebellion." It is unfair treatment of the child so that the child loses control and breaks out against all authority.

Surely this does not mean a child should never be spanked. Sometimes it is necessary that "the board of education should be applied to the seat of learning." "***He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.***" (Prov. 13:24). "***Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.***" (Prov. 22:15). "***Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.***" (Prov. 23:13,14). When I spanked my children, they knew there were going to get three good, hard licks with a belt on the bottom. I never struck them more than three times so as to curb my own tendency to anger. As a child grows older, it is not wise to use the rod but much more effective to remove privileges. Whatever form of discipline we use, it should always be administered in love. When you spank a child, always take him into your arms and tell him (or her) you love him. Always let your child know it hurts you to have to discipline but you do it because you love the child and God has commanded you to discipline out of love for Him.

There are various ways fathers and mothers can break the spirit of a child as well as break the will. In horse training, if you break the spirit of a horse as well as the will, then you have ruined the horse - how much more so is this true in a child? Colossians 3:21 says, "***Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.***" The Living Letters says, "***Fathers don't scold your children so much that they become discouraged and quit trying.***" The Phillips Translation says, "***Fathers, don't over-correct your children, or they will grow up feeling inferior and frustrated.***" How do parents discourage a child so that he feels inferior, loses heart and gets frustrated?

Over-Discipline. Parents may overreact. They fail to distinguish between major and minor offenses. Someone has said, “Often parents use sledge hammers to drive thumb tacks with their children.” Sometimes parents out of their own frustration and anger come down too hard on the kid and the child senses the parents’ frustration. Parents can be too harsh and unfair in discipline. Rigid, military discipline which says, “Do this or else” will drive a child to revolt when he comes to those teenage years.

Martin Luther’s father was so stern with him that all his life Luther found it difficult to pray, “Our Father.” The “father” in his mind stood for nothing but severity.

There was a father who ordered his family about like a field general. He had been in the military and he tried to run his household that way. He assembled the family every morning, lined them all up, the wife and the kids, and gave them the orders for the day. One day when he had them lined up, he said to them, “Now, are there any questions?” One little boy raised his hand. The father said, “What is it?” The boy said, “How can I get out of this outfit?” This is the feeling of any child who comes from a rigid, military atmosphere in the home.

Over-Protection. Parents are always telling their children “no.” Children grow up thinking that life is one big negative and often it develops into a state of legalism. When a mother in all sincerity says to her child, “You can’t go into the water until you learn to swim” this frustrates a child because he can’t learn to swim until he gets into the water. The negative approach to children by parents produces negative, fearful and resentful kids. Children must be given more freedom as they prove trustworthy to handle it.

A child in school was asked his name. He said, “My name is Don’t!” The teacher thought he was being smart or misunderstood, so she asked for an explanation. The boy said, “In my home, whatever I am and whatever I’m doing, my parents are constantly saying don’t, don’t, don’t to me. I’ve come to believe that my name is Don’t.”

Over-Achievement. Parents want their child to be a doctor, lawyer or a professional football player so they can make lots of money, and the child wants to be a dog catcher. Ambitious parents ruin many a child and cause him to lose self-esteem which in turn causes seething anger.

Over-Expectation. Parents often want their children to do better or be better than they are actually capable of doing. For instance, a child who is generally a “C” student brings home four “B’s” and one “C” and the parents say, “Is that all you could do? How come you got one “C”?” The child feels he can never live up to what the parents want and says, “What’s the use. No matter what I do and I can’t please them!” Kids need to hear parents say, “I love you no matter what you do!”

John Newton said, “I know that my father loved me--but he did not seem to wish me to see it.”

Over-Neglect. All children are going to feel neglected from time to time but parents can neglect a child so as to make the child feel unimportant, unwanted and unneeded. Parents must take time with their children. If they can't take great quantities of time they can take quality of time.

When my children were younger, every Friday night was family night. I let nothing interfere with this time. When people would call me up to do something or visit them, I would say, "I'm sorry I have another appointment that night, but can I see you another time." My family appointment was part of my ministerial schedule. I didn't have a lot of time with my children but what time I did have was quality and the kids understood that.

Over-Critical. Quite often parents will belittle their children in front of their peers, using ridicule and sarcasm. They might call the child stupid, lazy, ugly or grumpy seriously or in a kidding manner and this will embarrass the child. A critical spirit breeds nothing but contempt.

Parents can be so picky and critical with their children that they forget to encourage them. Someone has said, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Martin Luther, brought up in that stern home, would often say, "Spare the rod and spoil the child, but beside the rod, keep an apple to give him when he does well." Every child must be praised and encouraged when he does right.

Benjamin West is a famous painter. He tells the story of a time when he was young. His mother went away and left him in charge of his sister. He had the inspiration to paint a portrait of his sister Sally. He found a bunch of inks in the house and there were various colors. In the process of painting the picture, the ink was smeared from one end of the house to the other. The mother came in and saw all the ink everywhere, but she looked down and saw the picture of Sally. She reached down and picked the picture up and said, "That's Sally. It is beautiful." She stooped down and gave Benjamin a big kiss rather than a kick in the pants. Later as an adult, Benjamin West said, "My mother's kiss made me a painter."

Over-Indulgence. In the 19th century, the father was often the tyrant in the family and children had to toe the mark; consequently, children reacted to this. In our day, it is just the opposite. We give our children everything and give into them on every issue, letting them pretty much have their own way. We in essence are letting children raise themselves or even more bizarre, we are letting children raise their parents. This breeds contempt and disrespect in the child. Lack of discipline will make a child insecure, miserable and self-centered. A spoiled child will run rough shod over everyone's feelings.

FATHERS ARE TO TRAIN THEIR CHILDREN (6: 4c): *Instead bring them up in the training (of the Lord).*

The word “training” has to do with teaching and education through discipline. It is a discipline “Of the Lord”; that is, it is His discipline and we are to discipline our children as the Lord would do it. God has entrusted the responsibility of disciplining children to parents but it is to be done for the Lord and as the Lord would have it done. In the Lord, we should never over discipline or under discipline.

Parents often use the decibel system of discipline, especially mothers. They yak, nag and scream and when the child hears that certain pitch level, he knows he is in trouble. Discipline should always be administered fairly, immediately and in love. Children will respect this approach.

Parents may at times administer unfair discipline because of improper facts. If this is the case, parents should confess this to God and humbly go before their children admitting their mistake. Children will also respect this approach.

Quite often parents fear the teenage years. Someone has said, “If we could bury our kids at age 12 and resurrect them at age 20, life would be a lot easier.” We do not need to fear the teenage years if we have been carrying out discipline in love with our children in those early years. In fact, I can testify that the teenage years were the best years with our children. There were problems but they were not insurmountable with the Lord.

FATHERS ARE TO INSTRUCT THEIR CHILDREN (6:4d): *And instruction of the Lord.*

Parents, especially the fathers are to instruct their children by example, by formal instruction and by informal instruction. Someone has said that, “everything in the modern home is turned on by switches except children.” Children must be turned on by the Holy Spirit, by good examples of parents and by instruction which relates to life.

There should be a family altar, but more important parents should teach their children through real life situations. If some famous person dies by a drug overdose or AIDS, take that opportunity to talk to the child. Listen to the music your child is listening to and rap with him or her about it. Our children learn more by example of their parents than any other way. Someone has said, “To our forefathers, the Christian Faith was an experience. To our fathers it is an inheritance. To our generation it is a convenience. To our children, it is a nuisance.” Why? Because children don’t see Christ in their parents. ***“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Think about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*** (Deut. 6:6).

Again it is through relationships with our children that we teach them real Christianity. Kids do not always want to be instructed when we want to instruct them.

When our children were teenagers, some of the most precious times to instruct them was after they came in from a date or some event. We would sit around late at night, even until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. That was the time they wanted to open their lives and share.

CONCLUSION

Saved. Fathers and mothers are you in touch with your children? Are you communicating with them? Are you developing relationships with them? Do they sense your love and discipline? Recently a survey was taken of one thousand Christian parents and their teenagers. The survey was about communications. A mother commenting on her daughter said, "My relationship with my daughter is a good one. We are close and I feel she often confides in me and desires to please me. We are pals." The teenage daughter's reply was, "My mother is a witch; she smokes, is a holy roller and I despise her!" Obviously we have a communication gap here.

Dads, moms, we must love our children, discipline our children, set an example for our children, communicate with our children, seek to understand our children and do all we can to lead our children to Christ who alone can make them complete, adjusted and real people.

We have all heard the verse, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" I say to you, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his children?" Think about it for a moment. The only things you can take to heaven with you are your children (if they have believed in Christ) and others you have led to Christ. What a challenge this is to parents not to exasperate their children but to seek to live before them Christ and to lead them to Christ.

Unsaved

For you without Christ, I ask you, "What good is it for you if you gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?" How do you forfeit your soul? By living for self, for things, for sin and failing to accept Christ as Savior and Lord, is how one forfeits the soul.

How do you save your soul? By believing in Christ, by accepting Him as your Savior for sins and by bowing to Him as your Lord. The Bible says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).