

Lesson 5 **The Role of the Father in Child-Training**

Lack of Respect

“The younger generation no longer respects its elders; it tyrannizes its teachers, fails to rise when older people enter the room, and has atrocious manners.” That comment did not come from a “Letters to the Editor” column in a newspaper. It is the observation of a wise old gentleman who lived over 2,000 years ago by the name of Socrates. The problem of youth is as old as man himself.

The words of Socrates do not seem much different from those of a schoolteacher in America who resigned from her school system. She said, “The teachers are afraid of the principals, the principals are afraid of the parents, and the parents are afraid of the children. But the children are afraid of no one.”

Importance of Fathers

One of the basic reasons for disrespect of authority, moral breakdown and delinquency in our society is that men have abdicated their roles as fathers. We now know from scientific studies the key role the father plays in the normal healthy development of children.

A number of years ago I clipped an article out of Parade Magazine entitled “The Importance of Being Dad.” It stated the following about being a father: (1) a father influences the child so there is less delinquency, (2) the father affects the child’s IQ, (3) the father sets a pattern for *his* child’s mental health, (4) the father is essential for the emotional and feminine development of a daughter, and (5) the father is essential for the emotional and masculine development of a son.

Also, according to the Bible, the father is responsible for the discipline and spiritual training of the children.

THE ROLE OF THE FATHER

The primary task of child training and discipline has been placed into the hands of the father. This does not mean that a mother is not to discipline and train her child, but the overall responsibility rests with the father (Prov. 29:15). The father is the key to the spiritual, social and mental stability of a family.

It is a proven fact that in societies where the father is respected as the supreme authority in a home there is much less juvenile delinquency. Ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Jews and Italians are living proof of this.

Sometimes a father and mother disagree on the need and severity of discipline of a child. When this happens, the father must do what he thinks needs to be done, trusting his child and his wife to the Lord.

Carol and I have at times come into conflict over the discipline of our sons. I can think of one time in particular in which the situation was intense. In junior high, Mark was experimenting with alcohol. Sometimes he would come home from school a little high. Carol hid this from me, fearing what I might do. Finally, I found out. Then one night Mark went out and got drunk and I found out about it the next morning. Mark was still sleeping it off and I went to talk to him. I asked him, “Son, did you get drunk last night?” “No, Dad, I didn’t.” “Are you sure, son?” “Dad, you know I wouldn’t lie to you.” I had two reliable sources tell me that he had been drinking. I asked my son the same question three times and each time he gave me the same answer. Then I said, “Mark, for getting drunk, I was going to lightly discipline you, but for lying to me, I am going to make the discipline much worse.”

I went upstairs and contemplated what discipline would make an impact upon this rebellious son. I decided to take away playing on the basketball team for two games. His team was in the playoffs and Mark was the star player. If they got through the two preliminary games he could play in the finals. I then told Mark of my decision to remove him from basketball. He said to me, “Dad, you won’t do that to me because you want to see me play as much or more than I want to play.” But the decision was made and Mark was furious. It hurt Mark and it hurt me too, because I loved to watch my sons play basketball. I went to the principal and coach and told them of my decision and they cooperated.

When Carol heard of my decision to keep Mark out of basketball for two games, she was also upset with me. She said, “You are too harsh. You will drive Mark away from Christ!” I then said to Carol, “Honey, where is your doctrine of election? I can’t drive him away if he is elect and the Bible requires me to discipline.” Furthermore, God holds me responsible for the discipline of our children. If my son goes to hell because of my decision to discipline, then I will take that responsibility and face Christ at the Judgment Seat.” Carol ran into the kitchen and sobbed. About twenty minutes later, she came in and said, “Jack, I will stand with you in your decision.” This was a turning point in our son’s life because he knew we meant business and would not tolerate drunkenness and especially lying.

Fathers are to Respect the Feelings of the Children

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children.” “Fathers, do not embitter your children” (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). The meaning of “exasperate” in Ephesians 6:4 is to make angry, and in Colossians 3:21 the word “embitter” means to excite, or irritate. These are both present tenses in the Greek and mean the father should not continually and habitually be provoking, exasperating and embittering his children. We may exasperate our children by: (1) too much harsh discipline with no love, (2) too little discipline so that a child loses respect for his parents, (3) too much nagging at the child, (4) not spending enough time with the children, (5) unfair discipline without all the facts, (6) lack of consistency in discipline, and (7) breaking promises.

Fathers are to Bring Up their Children in the Training and Instruction of the Lord

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). “Training” has to do with child training in reference to Christian discipline that regulates the child’s life. This deals mainly with training by acts both positive and negative. “Instruction” literally means a putting in mind. This is training by word, whether encouragement or reproof.

Fathers Can Discourage Their Children.

“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col. 3:21). Children, because of constant provocation, can lose heart and respect for the parents, especially a father.

When you fail as a father before your children, do not be too proud to admit you are wrong and ask for forgiveness from your kids. This is a sign of strength not weakness.

Fathers Represent God to Their Children.

“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on,

however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:5-11).

It is a sobering thought that a human father represents God to his children. God is called “Father” and a human father is a pattern of God. If a father is mean and angry, the child may think of God like this. If the father is loving, fair and firm, the children may realize that God is all this and more. Many abused children have a hard time loving the Heavenly Father because they think God is like their human fathers.

In Hebrews 12:5-11, God used the picture of a human father to picture His dealings with Christians. The author of Hebrews wants his readers to know that the persecution they had undergone was a fatherly discipline at the hands of God. From this passage, we can find some principles children ought to have when disciplined by their human fathers. Children are not to despise discipline (12:5). Children are to grasp that discipline is the result of a loving father who cares (12:6). Children are given discipline to teach them respect for authority (12:9). Children are disciplined by their fathers for their own good (12:10-11).

“My little boy came to me one day;
Placed his tiny hand in mine and said:
‘Daddy, what is God like?’
And I said, ‘God is like love and sunshine,
And all the good things you know.’
He smiled into my eyes and said:
‘Then, Daddy, God must be just like you.’
I remembered how Jesus said that ‘God is like a Father.’
And I had to bow my head in shame that I, a father, was so unlike God.”

ELI, A FATHER WHO REFUSED TO DISCIPLINE

Eli’s Failure

Eli had two rebellious sons who did not know the Lord. ***“Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.” (1 Sam. 2:12).*** Apparently, Eli did little to curb the evil ways of his boys when they were younger, and only tried to admonish them when it was too late. ***“Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the woman who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, ‘Why do you do such deeds of yours. ‘No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord’s people’” (1 Sam. 2:22-24).*** The Lord brought judgment on these wicked sons by promising that they should die for their rebellion, but this didn’t shake them up, for sin has a hardening effect. ***“If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?’ His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’S will to put them to death” (1 Sam. 2:25).***

Eli 's Discipline

God's judgment came upon Eli as well as his sons, and the blame was put squarely on Eli himself. Why was Eli judged? Because his sons made themselves vile (blasphemed God) and Eli did not restrain them. ***“And the LORD said to Samuel: ‘See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them’” (1 Sam. 3:11-13).*** God's anger was so aroused at Eli and his house that no amount of repentance or sacrifice could change God's mind. ***“Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering’” (1 Sam. 3:14).***

A failure to keep God's revealed will in the Bible concerning the disciplining of children will bring the judgment of God, and sometimes no amount of repentance or dedication will change God's mind about the discipline. Eli was a saved man, but his rebellion brought God's discipline down on him and his family.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN TOWARDS THEIR PARENTS

Recognizing the Position of Parents

The son is to hear the instruction of the father. ***“Listen, my son, to your father's instruction” (Prov. 1:8).***

A wise son is one who listens to his father. ***“A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1).***

A son is a fool, if he does not listen to his father. ***“A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.” “A foolish son is his father's ruin” (Prov. 17:25; 19:13).***

A wise son makes a happy father. ***“A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother” (Prov. 15:20; 23:24).***

A foolish son brings grief to the father. ***“A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.” “A foolish son is his father ruin” (Prov. 17:25; 19:13).***

Children are not to curse their parents. ***“If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness” (Prov. 20:20).***

Children are to listen to the father and not despise the mother. ***“Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Prov. 23:22).***

A wayward child will never understand the heartbreak and sadness he will bring to his parents. If he ever understands, it may be when his own children grow up and become rebellious.

Recognizing the Necessity for Obedience

Children are to obey their parents. *“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.” “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1).*

Children are to honor their parents. *“Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6:2-3)*

Children who obey their parents are promised long life by the Lord. *“That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Eph. 6:3).*

The oldest woman I ever knew was in her late nineties, Omi Culpepper. I once asked Omi if she was an obedient child who honored her father and mother. Her reply was, “God taught me to obey my parents in his commandments.” My reply to her was, “And that is the reason for your long life.”

God will bless the obedient child in a special way. A child should be obedient even when the father or mother are wrong, for God will bless for this submissive attitude.

Parents do not always have to give reasons to their children for the commands they give them. The children are to obey, knowing that the parents have much more wisdom and understanding.

CONCLUSION

Discipline is painful for parents and child alike, but it is essential for the normal growth of the child. Parents should pray God would give them the grace to administer discipline and children should pray God would grant them the grace to receive it.

Children must realize that loving discipline brings good results. Therefore parents, for God’s sake, for their own sake and for their children’s sake, should bring children up in loving discipline of the Lord.

It is humbling for Christian parents to be reminded that their children will get a right or wrong view of God by how they bring up the child.

“Last night my little boy confessed to me some childish wrong;
And kneeling at my knee, he prayed with tears –
‘Dear God, make me a man like Daddy -- wise and strong;
I know you can.’

“Then while he slept I knelt beside his bed,
Confessed my sins,
And prayed with low-bowed head.
‘O God, make me a child like my child here –
Pure, guileless,
Trusting Thee with faith sincere.’”

Are you being a father to your kids? Perhaps you are saying to yourself, “I’m never home,” or “It is not my nature to discipline,” or “My wife is a better disciplinarian than me,” or “It just takes too much effort and I’m tired.” These are excuses for the real problem, which is sin

against God. Search your heart, confess your sin, turn to Christ as a delinquent father. Get up and keep moving for Christ, asking Him to make you the father He commands you to be in the Bible.