

Raising Godly Children

Raising Godly Children: Bible Principles for Parents to Follow in Family Training and Parenting

- How can Christian parents succeed in training children in the home?
- What parenting and child-raising authorities should fathers and mothers follow: the Bible or psychologists, social workers, and educators?
- What purpose and goal should families pursue?
- How important are love and instruction in the family and parenting?
- Should fathers and mothers seek to be parental authority figures?
- How should parents motivate and discipline unruly children?
- What about spanking, punishment, and rewards?
- Is it possible for a father and mother to raise godly children despite modern social pressures in entertainment, recreation, and education?

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Introduction:

Why this study is needed:

Families in our society present a serious yet interesting contrast.

Generally families have material and social advantages as great as any generation ever had.

Most families have material goods and luxuries unknown to previous generations. Most have greater prospects for a long life. Most have unparalleled opportunities for education, leisure, entertainment, and recreation.

One might think families would be happy and trouble-free.

Yet families today face incredible conflict and hardship.

These include:

- * **Divorce** - As of 1999 marriages were more likely to end by divorce than by death. (James Dobson letter, 11/99)
- * **Crime** - The arrest rate among juveniles nearly tripled from 1965 to 1990. (Bennett, p. 4)
- * **Government dependence** - In 1991 more than one child in eight was raised on government welfare. (Bennett, p. 5)
- * **Births to unmarried women** - In 1990 five times more children were born outside marriage than in 1960. (Bennett, p. 9)
- * **Single-parent families** - 35% of all children now do not live with their biological father. (Dobson letter)
- * **Suicide** - The suicide rate among teens more than tripled from 1960 to 1990. (Bennett, p. 12)

Many families do not have these problems, but the evidence shows that parent-child relationships are facing increasing hardships.

And Christians are by no means immune. In nearly every congregation at least half the young people end up not serving God faithfully.

The subject of raising children deserves careful study.

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Why you need to study this subject, regardless of who you are:

* Are you a **parent**? Surely you know you need to study about raising children.
* Are you a **young person**, not yet married? Almost certainly someday you will be a parent or will work with children in some capacity (teacher, counselor, etc.). The time to prepare for an important task is **before** it begins. If you wait till you face the situation, it may be too late to seek training. Why are you in school now? You are training to prepare for future responsibilities in life. Likewise, you need to study parenthood now **before** you begin.

* Are you an **older person** with grown children or no children? You need to teach others God's will, including teaching about parental duties.

Hebrews 5:12 - The time comes when you ought to be teachers. In particular, men may preach sermons or teach Bible classes or private studies.

Titus 2:3 - Older women too must be teachers of good things. Especially they must teach young women their duties as wives and mothers (vv 4,5).

Acts 20:27 - Christians must teach "the whole counsel of God." That includes Bible teaching about parenthood. All of us need to learn this!

So if you have children or ever will have them, and even if you don't have them, as a Christian you need to know God's will. You need this study!

Our purpose is to learn how parents can raise children successfully despite the problems we face.

The foundational belief in these studies is that God's word provides the best way to raise children.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. By following God's word we can raise children who avoid evil and serve God faithfully.

Bible principles about child raising are so critical that we will refer to them as the "keys" that open the door to success. We will consider them under seven headings. Hence, "Seven Keys to Raising Godly Children."

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Note: I do not claim perfection or expertise as a parent. I made many mistakes. Fortunately, my children have overcome most of them. Perhaps you can benefit from my mistakes. But in any case I am not the standard. God's word is the standard, so we will appeal to it.

As in other areas of God's word, there are general teachings and specific teachings.

God told Noah to make an ark of gopher wood (Gen. 6:14). Noah had to abide within God's specified instructions (gopher wood), but he had his choice of many tools or methods that would constitute "making" an ark.

Likewise, God teaches us to take the Lord's supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). That restricts us to the specified day, but by general authority that we are free to decide what time on the first day of the week.

So also, when God states a principle regarding raising children, we must all act within the teaching of that principle. Yet one family may apply that principle somewhat differently from another family, even though both may be following God's word.

In this study I may give advice that harmonizes with Bible principles, but that may not be the only way to apply them. But whatever we do must fit what God's rules say. If what we say or do disagrees with God's rules, then we are disagreeing, not with people, but with God.

Let's consider together Seven Keys for Raising Godly Children.

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The Seven Keys for Raising Godly Children

Purpose

Planning

Love

Instruction

Authority

Motivation

Consistency

Sources Used

Dare to Discipline, Dr. James Dobson (abbreviated DTD).

Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, William Bennett, Heritage Foundation, et. al.; 1993 (abbrev. Bennett).

Training Up a Child, Gwendolyn Webb; The Old Landmarks, Denver CO, 1977 (abbreviate TUAC).

Key #1: Purpose

No one can succeed in any task without keeping his goal clearly in mind. Imagine a baseball team that becomes so wrapped up in their beautiful uniforms, beautiful ball park, and making commercials that they forget about winning ball games. Uniforms and a ball park are helpful - even commercials may be all right - but the players must remember their goal is to win games! So parents must keep their responsibility clearly in mind. What do you consider to be your goal as a parent? What would it take to make you feel that you had been a success or a failure as a parent?

I. Parents Must Set Goals.

If you are a parent, you must have proper goals, and you must work diligently toward those goals. Whether you like it or not, if you have children you must recognize that you are responsible to raise your children properly. Too many parents simply don't want to accept their responsibility as parents. They expect others to raise their children: the government, schools, church, babysitters, day-care centers, or their friends or relatives. Meanwhile the parents pursue other interests. Some fathers think they will leave the children to the mothers to raise (or vice-versa). Some divorce and leave the home or otherwise desert their children. Some spend too much time away from home pursuing other interests. Some simply don't bother. This is unacceptable.

A. You Brought These Children into the World.

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When you participated in the act that produces children, you accepted the responsibility to care for any child that was conceived. Your children did not ask to come here. You brought them here. Now it's your job to take care of them. You may say that a child was "an accident" - you did not intend to conceive. But the fact is that, if you chose to participate in the act that may result in a child, then you are responsible for any child that results.

The government did not bring your child into this world. You did. So don't expect the government to raise your child. Likewise, for the church, the schools, the day-care center, and your parents or relatives - none of them brought your children into this world. You brought them here; now you take care of them. Caring for them properly must be your goal.

B. God Holds You Responsible for Raising Your Children.

Titus 2:4 - Young women should be taught to love their children. Love requires caring for them. This is something that can and must be learned. Women who do not learn it will cause God's word to be blasphemed (v5).

Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers are commanded to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You cannot leave this up to others, including your wife (though, of course, she is responsible too). You are responsible. You have no right to shirk this duty or try to shift it to others.

Genesis 18:19 - God approved of Abraham, because he commanded his children to keep the way of the Lord. He did not leave this duty up to others.

1 Samuel 3:12-14 - On the other hand, when Eli's sons became corrupt, God held Eli accountable. God rebuked Eli, not the schools or the government or even just Eli's wife.

Parents must accept the goal of raising their children properly and must diligently work toward that goal. They must not leave this to others.

II. Some Goals Are Proper but Are Not the Main Goal.

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A. Parents May Have Various Goals in Raising Children.

Some parents may emphasize goals that are of little importance and could even become problems: physical beauty, athletic achievement, popularity, etc. But there are other goals that parents ought to pursue for their children:

- * We should meet our children's physical needs.
- * We should provide a good education.
- * We should prepare them for life, so they can have a happy marriage and be good citizens and neighbors.
- * We may even provide some recreation, entertainment, and enjoyment.

1 Timothy 5:8 - If any does not provide for his own, and especially for his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Christians should provide wholesome benefits for our children (Matt. 7:9-11).

B. But These Are Not Our Primary Goal as Parents.

Many parents are too concerned about physical pursuits.

Luke 12:15 - Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." He then told of a man who obtained great wealth but neglected God (vv 16-21). When the man died, what good did his wealth do him?

Matthew 16:26 - What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Likewise, what profit are we to our children if we give them all the world has to offer, but they are eternally lost?

Many parents spend long hours working to provide physical things for their children, but they are so busy working that they neglect to give their children time and attention.

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Other parents spend many hours with their children in physical or material pursuits: sports, clubs, school functions, music, etc. They are constantly on the run, but the emphasis is material, physical, and social.

I know one lady in the church whose daughter was named high school homecoming queen. The mother said this was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to her. When success in temporal things is our greatest joy, no wonder our children don't serve God! And sure enough, that woman's daughter never became a Christian.

The result of these approaches is exactly what we see in society: children who have hosts of physical advantages but are neither godly nor happy.

On the other hand, many "poor" families are highly successful.

I have known families with one old car, no TV, 4-room house, plain clothes, and just a basic education. But the children knew God's will, had close family ties, and grew up serving God faithfully.

Many children today are spoiled by over-providing. They don't appreciate what they are given and grow up thinking the world owes them a living.

Deuteronomy 18:10 - "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire..." Most of us would not think of sacrificing a child to worship an idol. But covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). Too many parents over-emphasize material pursuits: possessions, toys, education, popularity, beauty, sports, etc. Unknowingly, such parents are sacrificing their children to the idols of covetousness and worldliness.

III. The Main Goal Is to Train Children to Serve God So They Can Receive Eternal Life.

A. Consider God's Goals for Parents.

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Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in *the way he should go*, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Our children will not always have us around to guide their decisions. We must instill in them the understanding and habit of doing right, so they will serve God when they make their own decisions.

Ephesians 6:4 - Bring your children up in the training and admonition of the **Lord**.

Genesis 18:19 - Abraham commanded his children to *keep the way of the Lord*, to do righteousness and justice. This should be the goal of all fathers who are truly faithful to God.

Psalms 34:11 - Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you *the fear of the Lord*. To accomplish this, we must give our children many things money cannot buy: time, love, instruction in God's word, guidance in dealing with life's problems, an example of godliness, and training in moral purity.

Joshua 24:15 - Joshua declared, "As for me and my house, we will *serve the Lord*." We should keep this goal constantly before us. With each decision we should ask, "What effect will this have on my child's eternal destiny?"

Malachi 2:15 - What does God seek when He joins a man and woman in marriage? He seeks *godly offspring*.

Our children are not given us to do with as we please. They are not our property. They are God's children given into our care, so we can raise them to be what **He** wants them to be.

Suppose our children grow up, get good jobs, have happy marriages, and are good neighbors and citizens, but do not live as faithful Christians. Then they are failures, and we have failed to accomplish our purpose as parents.

On the other hand, suppose our children don't receive college educations, live below middle-class American standards, and are not particularly athletic or outwardly beautiful, but they serve God faithfully. If so, they are successes, and we have been successful parents.

Throughout these studies we will emphasize principles that will help parents lead their children to put God first in life. We are studying how to raise *godly* children.

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[Deut. 4:10; 6:7ff; 11:18ff; Tit. 1:6; Psa. 78:4ff; Jer. 32:39; 2 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 19:13ff]

B. Consider Then the Seriousness of This Responsibility.

The parents' choices may determine their children's eternal destiny.

Proverbs 23:13,14 - Do not withhold correction from a child. You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Because so many children do not turn out well, people frequently emphasize that there are exceptions to this passage.

I believe that a diligent study of proverbs shows that many of them do have exceptions [20:28; 21:2; 22:7,11]. To say there are no exceptions to Prov. 22:6 would imply that the eternal destiny of children can be totally determined by parents, leaving the children without free will.

When children do not turn out well, we should all surely sympathize. The parents need to consider if they made mistakes. If they did, they should repent and ask forgiveness. What parents don't make mistakes?

But the fact remains that Proverbs 22:6 is a general statement of truth!

It is written to give parents confidence that, if they follow God's word, they can raise children to serve God and be saved! In our effort to console the parents of ungodly children, let us take care that we don't give the impression that raising godly children is nearly impossible.

I know a preacher who said repeatedly, "Every family has a black sheep." What passage teaches that? None! But he believed it, and sure enough he raised two "black sheep." If you think you cannot raise godly children, you are defeated before you start!

Regardless of occasional exceptions, the *rule* is that, if we do our job right, our children will be saved.

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The fact so many people want to talk about the exception to the passage reveals much about the problems in the Lord's church. We are losing the majority of children, and there is no way the verse can justify that!

Instead of making excuses, let us just admit that many parents are not doing their job well. Let us learn from our mistakes and start studying God's word to find out how to do it right!

"Wouldn't it be terrible to have a child who was born with a serious physical or mental handicap or who died young?" Yes. But how infinitely worse to know my child faces torment in a Devil's hell! I cannot imagine any more terrible tragedy that could happen to one of my children. And I may very well determine whether or not that happens.

The parents' choices may determine their own eternal destiny!

1 Samuel 3:12-14 - Note that Eli himself was rejected for his children's sins, because he had failed as a parent! (Cf. 2:22-25).

Ecclesiastes 12:14 - God will bring every work into judgment, and that includes our work as parents. When we stand before God to give account for our lives, He will judge us for our diligence as parents.

My job as a parent is to raise my children to serve God. If I don't get my priorities straight so that I raise them to serve God first, He will hold *me* accountable.

To a large extent, your children's destiny *and your destiny* depend on whether or not you train your children as God's word says.

Conclusion

Let us not make the mistake of the baseball team that forgot its real purpose. Let us realize the seriousness of our responsibility as parents and keep our eye on our goal. If we have gotten off track and put too much emphasis on temporal things, let us repent. And let us all accept the challenge to raise godly children.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Key #2: Planning

When our children were small, L. A. Stauffer gave us this advice about raising children: "Just keep *thinking* and you'll be all right." This oversimplifies, but it shows that being a good parent requires thought and planning.

I. The Importance of a Good Plan

A. Every Important Work Needs to Be Planned.

If we wish to succeed in any important, difficult endeavor, first we must determine our *goal*. Then we must develop a *plan* for reaching our goal.

Planning is important in everyday life.

* If a business is to succeed, it must have a goal and a plan for reaching that goal.

* In building a house, one must have a blueprint to follow.

* Consider the years of planning needed to send a spaceship to the moon.

Often we fail to reach our goals because we fail to develop a clear plan for reaching them.

Planning is essential in spiritual matters.

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*** God planned His work:**

Hebrews 8:5 - God had a plan for the tabernacle.

1 Peter 1:18-20 - God had a plan for our redemption before the world began.

[Eph. 1:7-9]

Ephesians 3:10,11 - The church was part of God's eternal purpose.

Romans 8:28 - God purposed to call us to salvation (through the gospel - 2 Thess. 2:13,14).

*** Our service to God requires planning and forethought.**

Proverbs 14:22 - We receive mercy and truth if we devise (plan) good.

Luke 14:26-33 - We must count the cost of discipleship before we begin.

Psalms 17:3 - David purposed not to transgress with his mouth. This was no accident. He planned it that way.

Acts 11:23 - Barnabas urged new converts to continue with the Lord with purpose of heart. We will continue to be faithful only if we plan to do so.

2 Cor. 9:7 - We should even plan the amount we give to the church.

Yet amazingly, hosts of parents, including members of the church, enter into marriage and parenthood with very little thought, study, or discussion about how they plan to succeed in raising their children. How much time and effort have you and your spouse spent in determining exactly what rules and principles you will follow in raising your children?

B. Planning Is Required to Deal with Harmful Influences.

Satan is battling us for the control of our children.

Ephesians 6:12 - We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

When the children of Christians go astray, often the parents say, "I just don't understand what happened." Often what happens is that powerful forces are working against us that we either are not aware of or do not deal with effectively.

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1 Timothy 6:12 - Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Satan is determined to lead our children away from God. Parents must realize, "it's war out there." To raise godly children, we must *fight evil*.

What army can win without a battle plan? We often lose our children because we don't recognize we are at war, so we have no plan for the fight!

2 Corinthians 2:11 - Satan will take advantage of us, if we are ignorant of his devices. We must be aware of the means he uses to destroy our children's faithfulness, then we must have a plan for combating those influences.

Other than family and church, what are the greatest influences in your children's life?

Peers

The desire to conform and be accepted is one of the strongest influences teenagers face. The way other children act, dress, and talk becomes a powerful force that Satan uses to get our children to accept the world's values.

Parade magazine asked teens what influences affected their value systems. In 1960 the greatest influence was parents, then teachers, then friends, then clergy, then counselors, and then popular heroes. In 1980 the same study determined that teens were influenced by: first friends, then parents, then the media (TV, music, and movies). (*Why Knock Rock?* Peters, p. 96)

Note these Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." But the fact is that many parents, including Christians, are deceived. We let our children have close friends that are worldly, irreligious, immoral, or rebellious, yet somehow think our children will escape harm.

Proverbs 13:20 - He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. If our children run with "the wrong crowd," inevitably they and we will suffer the consequences.

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Exodus 34:15,16 - One of the strongest areas of peer pressure young people face relates to dating and choosing a marriage companion. Marriage is the closest companionship there is, and dating leads to marriage.

Children of Christians often become too intimate in the dating relationship. They face powerful temptations and soon fall into sin. Or they "fall in love" or develop a close relationship with someone who is not a Christian, and soon they compromise truth to please their friend/spouse.

Time and again Christians have lost their children to Satan through the influence of friends. Will you succeed in dealing with such pressures, if you simply allow your children to do as they please?

How can you as a parent possibly train your children to be godly unless you have a specific, effective plan for dealing with peer pressure?

School

Most of us realize that schools face serious problems. But how serious? I once asked a group of teens, who had been raised by Christian parents, to list the problems they faced at school. Here is substance of their list:

- * Lying
- * Profanity, dirty jokes, etc. (students and teachers)
- * Drinking
- * Violence and fighting (students with students or with teachers)
- * Immodesty, lack of dress codes
- * Coed gym - immodest uniforms
- * Smoking
- * Peer pressure/bad crowds
- * Drugs (7 of 8 students personally knew children who used drugs).
- * Ridicule and making fun of children who are good or different
- * Gossip, slander
- * Cheating
- * Stealing and vandalism

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- * Dancing
- * Disrespect for teachers and parents
- * False goals (popularity, wealth)
- * Classes that justify evolution, abortion, homosexuality, situation ethics, contraceptives, divorce, premarital sex, disrespect for parents, etc.
- * Reading assignments with immorality, violence, etc.
- * Sexual promiscuity - petting at school, pregnant girls, children talking openly about sexual relations, everyone expected to do it, etc.
- * Schedule conflicts with church activities

Do you honestly believe that your children can face this environment 8 or 9 hours a day for half the days of the year for 13 or more of the most impressionable years of their lives without consequence? Can you succeed if you just send your children off with no plan for dealing with these problems?

If "evil companions corrupt good morals," how can impressionable children face such an environment and maintain godliness unless you have a plan for fighting these evils?

Entertainment: Television, Movies, and Music

Suppose your child had three good friends who continually attempted to persuade your child to accept all the following practices:

- * Drug and alcohol abuse
- * The occult - witchcraft, Satanism, astrology, sorcery, etc.
- * Oriental religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, reincarnation, etc.
- * Violence, murder, suicide
- * Sexual promiscuity - fornication, adultery, homosexuality, immodesty and even nudity
- * Profanity, cursing, obscenity
- * Rebellion against parents, government, God and the Bible

Suppose your child was spending several hours every day visiting these friends and listening to them justify these ideas. Would you want your child to continue

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that relationship or would you try to break it off? If "running with a bad crowd" can corrupt your child's good morals, how can they not be influenced by close relationships with such evils?

Yet many children of Christians have three friends who are just like we have described. Those friends are named *television*, *movies*, and *music*.

Television

The average American watches TV 50 hours per week - ten hours more than the average workweek. (*Bennett*, p. 20)

A study of 58 hours of prime-time TV revealed: 5 rapes, 7 homosexual acts, 28 acts of prostitution, 41 examples of sexual relations between unmarried people.

But this study was in 1983! (*Christian Inquirer*, 7 and 8/83)

It has been estimated that, by the time the average child reaches age 18, he will have witnessed more than 15,000 murders on TV or in movies. (*Bennett*, p. 20)

In 1991 the National Coalition On Television Violence estimated that, if TV violence had never been introduced, each year the US would have 10,000 fewer murders, 70,000 fewer rapes, 1,000,000 fewer motor vehicle thefts, 2,500,000 fewer burglaries, and 10,000,000 fewer acts of larceny. Crime rates would be half what they are now. (Via *Gospel Anchor*, 8/91, p. 17)

Movies

Many Christians think nothing of letting children attend PG or PG-13 movies.

Here is a survey of the contents of PG and PG-13 movies in 1988:

Nearly 1/4 have the "f-word."

61% take God's name in vain.

71% contain vulgar references to excretion, intercourse, or genitals.

50% imply sexual intercourse.

13% show intercourse.

30% show explicit nudity.

75% include moderate or severe violence.

74% depict alcohol or drug abuse (via *Citizen*, 1/89)

Modern music

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On the average, "teens listen to 10,500 hours of rock between 7-12 grades ... just 500 hours less than the total time they spend in school over 12 years" (*US News and World Report*, 10/28/85, pp. 46-49; via. Gary Fiscus).

Consider the problems in modern music:

* Drugs

"...the rock scene is permeated by the values and practices of the drug culture. Many rock stars have become cult heroes, and many of them take drugs. Children can often identify the current rock stars, and may identify with their lifestyles ... Since the [mid-sixties] many rock lyrics have had drug overtones.

"Rock concerts pose an additional problem ... In many cities, drugs are sold and used openly at these concerts; no real attempt is made to enforce either the drug or the alcohol laws. Rest rooms in public concert halls are often cluttered with children as young as 11 who are getting high, vomiting, or shaking from unpredictable drug and alcohol effects. Most parents are unaware of all this" (*Parents, Peers, and Pot*, Marsha Manatt, US Dept. of Health and Human Services, pp. 24,25).

* Violence

Surveys by the National Coalition on Television Violence reveal that over 50% of rock videos feature or suggest violence. ("Violent Videos: a Close Look at MTV," Miller, *Christianity*, 4/85, p. 24). One coalition survey revealed that MTV (music video channel) showed an average of 18 violent incidents per hour (Peters, p. 40).

* Sexual immorality

Rolling Stone Magazine: "The surest shortcut to memorable videos seems to be a liberal dose of sex, violence, or both" (12/8/83, p. 76; via Peters, p. 40).

Chris Stein (Blondie) said: "Everyone takes it for granted rock and roll is synonymous with sex" (*People*, 5/21/79, p. 53; via Peters, p. 107).

John Oates: rock and roll is "99 percent sex" (*Circus*, 1/31/76, p. 39; via Peters, p. 108).

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Elvis Costello: "Rock and Roll is about sex, and I'm here to corrupt the youth of America" (*AFA Journal*, 11&12/88, p. 20).

* Alienation from parents

A Jefferson Starship member said, "our music is intended to broaden the generation gap [and] alienate children from their parents" (Peters, p. 105).

Malcom McClaren: "Rock N' Roll is pagan and primitive and very jungle and that's how it should be. The moment it stops being those things it's dead. ... The true meaning of rock ... is sex, subversion and style" (*Rock magazine*, 8/83, p 60; via Peters, p. 107).

I'm not saying Rock is the only music that can be corrupt. But do you honestly believe you can raise godly children without a plan for fighting such influences as this? If you would not just allow your children to run with any peer group of their choosing, then why allow them to watch TV or movies or listen to music without a plan for supervising it?

The point is not that raising godly children is impossible. It can be done, but no parent will succeed without an effective plan for dealing with these influences.

II. The Importance of Following the Proper Authority.

How do we develop a good plan? Where do we go for guidance? Many people think it is impossible to know the best way to raise children. Is there a sure guide? Can we *know* the best way?

A. We Must Not Rely on Human Theories.

Many parents follow human authorities.

Many sources profess to offer parents advice, and many parents accept this advice: psychologists, sociologists, government officials, social agencies, and other child-raising experts.

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Other parents just raise their children the way their own parents raised them. This may be done knowingly, but often it is done without thinking. We just naturally treat our children according to what we are familiar with - we act the way we saw our parents act. This amounts to accepting their own parents as the best authority for how to raise children.

Notice that these are all human authorities. Humans are fallible and often make mistakes, so it is reasonable that many of their theories do not work. This is especially true if our goal is to raise *godly* children.

Remember the Bible warnings about following human authority.

Proverbs 14:12 - There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Jeremiah 10:23 - The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. No man is as wise as God, so no one by human wisdom alone can know how to please God. This includes all child-raising experts. If they don't follow God's guidance, they cannot tell us how to raise godly children.

1 Corinthians 1:19-21; 2:4,5 - In matters of godliness and righteousness, we must follow divine wisdom, not human wisdom. This does not mean human advice is always wrong. Sometimes people give advice that agrees with the Bible. But it is always wrong whenever it disagrees with the Bible.

Christians generally know we must not depart from God's pattern to follow human theories for worship, salvation, the church, etc. But raising children is a God-given command and obligation just as surely as are these other areas. When human ideas differ from God's word, we have no more right to follow them in raising children than in any of these other areas.

We are at war with forces of evil that lead people astray from God's will both in the church and in the home. We can no more defeat the forces of evil by following human wisdom in the home than we can in the church!

[Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Proverbs 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13]

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B. The Bible Is God's Guide for Raising Godly Children.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 - Raising godly children is a good work, and the Scriptures instruct us in righteousness and equip us for good works.

Joshua 1:8 - Joshua prospered in the work God gave Him when he followed God's word, not departing from it to the right or left. Likewise we will prosper in the work God gives us if we follow His word.

The Scriptures often compare God's relationship to His children to a father's relationship to his earthly children (Matt. 7:9-11; Heb. 12:5-11). This is why the term "father" is used both for God and for an earthly parent. It follows that parents can learn many things about our role by observing the example of God our Father in His dealings with us. We will often use His example as a source of guidance in these studies.

Makers of cars and appliances provide their customers with operator's manuals to show how to use the equipment successfully. So the Maker of the family has given us a book of instructions for the family. Does it make sense to follow the ideas of fallible humans, rather than the wisdom of the all-wise God who created both us and families?

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We do not need to be constantly confused about how to raise children. We can have the strength and guidance we need, but not through human wisdom. We must turn to Jesus.

[Deuteronomy 18:18-22; Psalm 19:7-9; 33:4; 119:128,142,160; John 17:17; Titus 1:2,3; Revelation 19:9; 21:5]

C. Observe and Learn from Winning Parents

While the Bible is the standard, other people who know and follow that standard can help us learn it.

Hebrews 6:12 - Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

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Titus 2:3-5 - Older women should teach the younger women how to love their children and be homemakers.

Years ago Karen and I observed that many parents were glad to advise us how to raise our children. But we saw very few - even very few Christians - who themselves were doing a really good job with their own children. Many will say that you are too strict, that spanking won't work, that you should conform to the choices others make about how to educate children, etc.

So before you accept advice, evaluate it by God's standard. And then ask how successful these givers of advice have been with their own children. Are their children obedient and respectful? Do their children know God's will, become Christians when they become accountable, and live faithful Christian lives? In short, do you see evidence that their children are turning out the way you want yours to?

The parents to imitate are those who are successful, not those who fail!

D. Father and Mother Should Discuss Their Plan and Agree.

Both the father and the mother must be involved in raising the children.

Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers are told to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1 - Children should be obedient to both parents.

Proverbs 1:8 - Mothers also have authority over their children.

To achieve their goal as parents and to avoid provoking children to discouragement, the father and mother must work together. Family rules must be consistent. This requires discussion and agreement.

The best time to make these plans is before problems arise. A couple should discuss their principles and beliefs about child raising even before they marry.

Then they should continue to talk about what their rules will be and how they will handle problems. Then when specific problems arise, they can handle them quickly and confidently.

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E. The Plan Must Be Accompanied by Prayer.

It is not enough just to recognize that the Bible is God's will. We must study and use its teachings as the basis for our plan for raising children. And we must pray diligently for wisdom and for God's blessings on our plans.

James 1:5 - We need to pray for wisdom. This wisdom will come as we study God's word. But we must diligently pray that we will be able to apply His word properly for the good of our children. [Heb. 5:14]

1 Chronicles 29:19 - David prayed for God to give his son Solomon a loyal heart to keep God's commandments. We should imitate this practice: Pray for each of your children each day by name, and ask God to strengthen them.

A young man who had gotten into serious trouble was asked about his upbringing. One thing he said was, "I can't remember ever hearing my parents pray for me."

You can learn from my mistake here. All my married life I have prayed every day for my wife and each of my children by name, but I never named them when I led a prayer in their presence. Your children need and deserve your prayers, and they need to know you name them in prayer.

Paul prayed diligently for other Christians and told them he was praying for them. Surely our children deserve at least that much from us.

Do you have a plan for raising your children, a plan based on God's word and prayer?

Conclusion

Too many parents let their own children manipulate them. "I just don't know what to do with them." We need to learn to out-think our children. Our duty as parents requires us to study God's word and apply it so we know how to raise godly children.

The Devil often defeats us, not because it is impossible for us to defeat him, but because ***we are not fighting him effectively***. We either are not aware of the

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danger, or else we are simply too indifferent to fight. By the time we realize our mistake, it is often too late. But we can win the battle, if we follow God's will and prayerfully develop a plan based on the principles it teaches.

For each child, you only have one chance to raise him/her properly, and that opportunity will so quickly be gone. When one is almost grown, it is too late to go back and start over if you haven't done it right. To succeed, we need a plan based, not on human wisdom, but on prayerful study and application of God's will.

Do you have a plan for raising your children? Is your plan based on God's word? How often do you discuss with your spouse the principles on which you act? How diligent are you in your effort to fight Satan and his evil influences on your children?

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Key #3: Love

The relation of parents to children must be characterized by love.

Matthew 22:37-40 - The greatest two commands are to love God and love our neighbor. The basis of any good relationship is love, because love leads us to seek the wellbeing of others. It leads us to do what is best for others (1 Corinthians 13:4,5).

Love is not always easy and pleasant; sometimes parents need "tough love." Let us consider what love leads parents to **do** and what it leads them to **not** do.

I. Begin by Loving One Another.

To have the proper loving family for their children, husband and wife need to start by loving one another.

A. Love Enough to Stay Together.

Matthew 19:9 - Surely love should lead husband and wife to be faithful to their marriage covenant. Neither should want their marriage to end. Children deserve the security of knowing their home will always be there.

Modern hedonistic society defends divorce by saying the children will soon get over it, and they may be better off. Parents think, "I can't make my children happy if I'm not happy, but I'll never be happy in this marriage." But this is selfishness, not love.

Divorce is incredibly traumatic to children, leaving scars for life. What troubled marriages need is not divorce but to learn to get along.

B. Love Enough to Learn to Treat One Another Right.

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It isn't enough just for parents to stay together; they also need to love and treat one another right.

Titus 2:4,5 - Young women should learn to love their husbands and children.

Love for children is associated with love for ones spouse. In fact, you cannot truly do either one without the other.

Ephesians 5:25,28,29,33 - The husband must love his wife as Christ loved the church and as he loves himself. Love her enough to provide for her, cherish her, and care for her as surely as you do yourself.

Notice that these passages teach that love can be learned. Biblical love does not always come naturally. Parents should have a natural affection toward one another and toward their children, but natural attraction itself does not always lead us to do what is best. Biblical love leads us to learn God's will for the family, then it motivates us to do it.

C. Love Enough to Show Affection.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 - Husband and wife should not deprive one another but give "the affection due" to one another. Context shows this includes especially sexual love, but there is a lot more to affection than that.

Husband and wife need to speak and act affectionately. Intimacy should be kept private, but children should never doubt that their parents love one another.

Do you love your wife/husband? If not, then repent and learn to love (previous point). Did you hug and kiss and hold hands when you were first married? Then what's so hard about it now? If you do love, then say so and show it! Your spouse needs to know it and your children need to know it.

Many children say, "I've never seen my parents hug and kiss." Or, "I've never heard my parents say they love one another." Why not? Would your children say that?

Children need to be raised in an atmosphere of love and good will. A pattern of fussing and fighting between parents leads to insecurity and fear for the children.

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And often the children will imitate that disruptive behavior in their own families when they marry.

On the other hand, when parents establish a pattern of stating and expressing affection, children have a sense of security and they learn the importance of showing affection in their own families.

The first and most basic aspect of love that any parents need is to learn to love one another. Their love for the children should follow from this.

II. Encourage Children Whenever Possible.

Colossians 3:21 warns us not to provoke our children to discouragement. This is also part of love. Just as love leads us to do good toward our spouse, it should then lead us to do good for our children.

There is a danger that we might be too lax and not require proper obedience. But there is also a danger that we may continually belittle the child till we make him feel worthless. Consider some specific concerns.

A. Avoid Humor that Frustrates, Discourages, or Angers.

Humor is good, and can be valuable in dealing with children. But humor is only good if everyone enjoys it and no one gets hurt by it. Humor that hurts other people's feelings is poor humor and violates the principle of love.

And remember that children are more sensitive at certain ages than at other ages. Things that may not bother us or other children at all, may yet really hurt a particular child at certain stages.

B. Avoid Belittling Childish Mistakes.

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This especially hurts the child when done in the presence of others and most especially in front of his friends. If a mistake needs correcting, do it in a way that shows the child you still love him.

And don't bring up a child's past mistakes and embarrass him in the presence of others. If the child can genuinely join in the humor, fine. But if you discourage him and make him feel inferior, what good have you accomplished?

C. Set Your Expectations Within Reach of the Child's Ability.

Too many parents expect perfection or achievements that are simply beyond the child at his best. Some parents demand things the child can't accomplish till he is older. Others compare him to other children who may simply possess abilities this child lacks. ("Susie got straight 'A's,' why can't you?")

D. Express Appreciation for Accomplishments.

Some parents constantly criticize and complain, but rarely give praise. We should challenge children to do their best. But many abilities just develop later in life than many parents expect. If a child makes a sincere effort but just receives criticism instead of praise, he will become discouraged and quit trying: "What's the use? I'll never please them anyway."

Read Col. 3:21 again.

We should not build our lives around our children or grant their every whim. But neither should we destroy their sense of worth by being indifferent to their feelings.

Do you treat your children in a way that makes them feel they are loved and appreciated?

III. Determine Rules and Punishments for the Child's Good.

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A. Make Rules for the Good of the Whole Group.

Children sometimes think that being a parent means you get to do whatever you want. This is a misunderstanding, but could it be that their parents' conduct gave them that idea?

1 Corinthians 13:3 - Love does not seek its own; it is not selfish. Love motivates us to do, not what we want, but what is best for the whole group.

Listen to the child and consider his view as you make decisions that affect the child. This is also a matter of love - doing to others as we would want them to do to us (Matt. 7:12).

One of the surest ways to discourage a child (Col. 3:21) is to act selfishly and unjustly toward him, using our authority unreasonably for our personal pleasure. This does not mean the child should just have his way. That is not good for him or for anyone in the group. There must be rules, and rules must be enforced. But they must be made for the good of all.

B. Exercise Punishment for the Good of the Child.

Some "authorities" claim that all punishment is inherently unloving. One says that, whenever punishment occurs, parents have forsaken "the positive feelings of love and understanding" (*The Complete Book of Mothercraft via Plain Truth about Child Rearing*, p. 58). This conclusion is false, but if parents aren't careful it can be true.

Hebrews 12:5-11 - God's chastisement of His people illustrates a father's discipline of his children. God chastens those He loves. This is for our profit and yields good fruit. Properly done, chastening is an act of love that benefits those who receive it.

Proverbs 13:24 - He who spares the rod hates his son. One who loves will chasten (use the rod) when needed. (Cf. Prov. 23:13,14.)

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The child needs to learn to act properly and respect authority. This will give him a much better life as an adult. We will discuss spanking and punishment later, but the point here is to remember to punish in love for the child's good.

C. Consider Some Specific Guidelines Regarding Making Rules and Punishing in Love

These involve personal judgment but are generally valid.

Never use your authority to get personal vengeance on a child.

Sometimes parents punish simply because they have been inconvenienced or embarrassed by the child. For example, suppose the child interrupts the parent from a pleasant activity or uses a bad word in front of the parent's friends. The child may need to be punished, but are we motivated by concern for the child, or are we acting from selfish reasons?

Never punish the child in a fit of uncontrolled anger.

Not all anger is sinful, nor it is wrong to punish a child in anger. God has often punished people in anger. But anger must be controlled (Eph. 4:26).

Sometimes parents beat a child (or worse) in a fit of rage. Others yell, scream, clench their teeth, and lose control. Such parents are not likely to act for the child's good.

Usually the solution is to punish the child **before** the parent loses his temper, while he is still in control.

Never use authority just to satisfy a desire for power.

Some parents seem to dominate children just to prove that they are boss, to satisfy their ego, or to impress their friends. Like tyrants or dictators they get a thrill from controlling others.

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Parents who use authority in unloving ways are wrong, first because they have disobeyed God's law of love, second because they unnecessarily discourage their children, and third because they are not likely to gain the child's respect and obedience.

When you make rules or punish your child, are you acting in love for your child's good?

IV. Willingly Sacrifice for the Children's Good.

Sacrifice and giving of ourselves are essential to Biblical love.

John 3:16 - God gave His Son because He loves us.

Luke 10:25-37 - The good Samaritan illustrated love by giving time, effort, concern, and even money for the wellbeing of another.

1 John 3:16-18 - We imitate the example of Jesus and show our love for others by giving what they need, not just by claiming to have love.

A. Children Need Our Time and Attention.

Too many children are simply neglected.

Too many children are unattended ("latch-key children"), roam the neighborhood, or go to day-care or baby-sitters day after day, simply because the parents are busy doing other things. Many misbehave because they are starved for attention and just want the parents to notice them. Other children may seem well behaved, but they never serve God faithfully because their parents never take the time to teach them God's ways.

Some parents are too involved in recreation, entertainment, or social activities to take the time to care, love, and guide their children. Many families rarely play together, work together, worship and pray together, and may not even eat

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together. We must spend time with children to answer their questions, listen to their problems, and give them guidance and instruction.

Fathers specifically should take time for their children.

Fathers are often too wrapped up in jobs or personal interests. We must provide a livable income (1 Tim. 5:8). But again, the goal is to raise godly children. What does it profit to provide physical necessities and luxuries, if our children do not grow up to serve God faithfully (Matt. 16:26)?

Fathers should make a point to eat meals with the whole family every day. They should take time to play with their children and study with their children and work with their children.

Many fathers realize too late that their priorities were wrong, but by then the children are gone and it is too late to establish a relationship with them. What sacrifices are you making to give your children the time and attention they need?

B. Specifically, Children Need a Full-time Mother.

This is God's plan, and anything less is less than satisfactory. Granted there may be emergency situations where the father is unavoidably unable to provide even basic necessities, and the mother may need to leave the home temporarily to help out. But this is never a good situation and should be changed as soon as possible.

Psalm 113:9

God blesses a woman by giving her a home and making her a joyful mother of children. Motherhood is a cause for joy. Praise God for it! No profession is more valuable, more needed, or more fulfilling. Yes, it is frustrating and tedious at times, but so is man's work.

1 Timothy 5:14

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Young widows should marry, bear children, and guide the house. Woman was created to protect unborn children, give them birth, and then nourish them. This creates a unique bond between her and her child that no one else can ever replace. She is uniquely suited both physically and emotionally for the care of children. When she marries and has children, her work is at home caring for her family.

Many parents have accepted the false arguments of "Women's Liberation." They think children won't suffer if the mother leaves to take a job away from home. Yet often the result is that children spend many hours unattended or at day-care. And then when mother is home, she is too tired or too busy catching up on housework to spend time with the children.

Titus 2:4,5

Young women should be taught to love their husbands and children and be "workers at home" (ASV), "homemakers" (NKJV), "keepers at home" (KJV). The mother's work is "at home," and her work is to keep or care for the home (family). Note that love for her family should motivate her to do this work. Her family needs her time and attention, and she thereby fulfills the purpose for her creation. [See also Prov. 31:27; 7:11.]

Many Bible examples show men laboring away from home to provide income for the family: carpenters, shepherds, farmers, physicians, fishermen, etc. But the mother's work is at home caring for the family. There is simply no one who can fully replace her.

Question: How many of the responsibilities in vv 4,5 may a woman hire someone else to take over for her, while she chooses to do something else instead? May she hire someone else to love her husband, be discreet, chaste, or obedient to her husband, while she chooses to do something else? The idea is absurd!

We may pay people to provide secondary assistance by doing some specific task under our supervision (paint a room or provide health care or some specific instruction). But why have many come to believe that a woman may hire other

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people to take over supervising her household or take over the care of her children hour after hour, day after day, while she chooses to work a secular job? Is that what God intended when He inspired this passage?

John 10:11-14

Jesus contrasts a hireling to a shepherd who owns the sheep. The owner will give his life for the sheep, because he cares for them. The hireling does not have the same commitment or care and will not make the same sacrifices for the good of the sheep. **Note the principle: a hireling will give inferior care and will not make the same sacrifices, because the sheep do not belong to him.**

If this principle applies to sheep, how much more so to children who are of much greater value than sheep? **To hire other people to raise children in the parents' place puts the children under inferior care.** Even if the "hireling" is a Christian, she does not have the natural attachment and sense of care that the children's own mother ought to have. If a woman has properly learned to "love her children," why would she choose to put them under inferior care while she does some other job? How can that be harmonized with love?

Again, there may be emergencies where the father is incapacitated or otherwise unable to provide. But isn't it true that many mothers simply *choose* to work away from home, while other people take care of their children? Doesn't this often mean that children do not receive the training and instruction they need, many end up having serious moral problems, and many simply never do serve God faithfully? Isn't this a major cause of family problems in our society?

Parents simply must realize that raising children takes much time - quantity time and "quality" time. We must take the time to be with them and teach them. They must know that we are available when they need us and that we are willing to spend time with them. This will require parents to love their children enough to make sacrifices of time and of material prosperity.

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V. Learn to Show Affection to Children.

Christian families should be affectionate families. This is also something that can and should be learned.

A. Appreciate Our Children as Blessings from God.

Genesis 33:5 - Jacob stated that God had graciously given him his children. Is this how we feel? Some people obviously don't appreciate their children. They abuse them, desert them, leave them to die, give them away, or murder them before they are even born.

Psalms 127:3-5 - Children are a heritage from the Lord. A man who has his quiver full is a happy man. Yet some act like caring for children is unbearable drudgery. We grumble and complain every time we have to do something for them.

Psalms 128:3,4 - Children around our table are a blessing from God. We need to improve our attitude toward children. Let there be no "unwanted children," not because we have murdered them as pro-abortion advocates suggest, but because we have learned to love and appreciate them (Titus 2:4).

How often do you really thank God for your children? Do you consider them a blessing or a burden? Do you act like you appreciate them?

B. Show Affection by Words and by Physical Contact.

Deep emotional needs are met for children when their parents say they love them and then show that they really mean it.

Fathers especially need to learn to express love.

Men tend to think it is effeminate to show love. This was another of my mistakes. My father was not particularly affectionate. His mother died when he was young and he grew up living with other families. The most affection I remember him

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showing when I was little was "whiskering" me. As a teenager, I did not want to show affection for others.

Karen's family is affectionate. They hug when they greet and say goodbye. Sometimes the women cry. It took a while, but I now know their way is best. Every person has a fundamental need for security and a sense of belonging and closeness. If this need isn't met in the home, children will seek it elsewhere such as among peers. Boys may join gangs. Girls may become sexually promiscuous to find acceptance from a guy.

Parents, hug and kiss your kids. Tell them you love them.

Do it often every day! This includes your teenage boys!

- * Is our Heavenly Father an example of a good father? He frequently assures us, both by deed and by word, that He loves us.
- * Genesis 33:4 - When the brothers Jacob and Esau met after a long separation, they embraced, kissed, and wept.
- * Genesis 45:15; 46:29 - After long separation Joseph embraced, kissed, and wept with his brothers and then his father.
- * Genesis 48:10 - Jacob kissed and embraced Joseph's sons.
- * 1 Kings 19:20 - As a grown man Elisha kissed his father and mother goodbye.
- * Luke 15:20 - When the prodigal son returned, his father embraced and kissed him.
- * Romans 12:15 - Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Surely that applies in the home.

Are these examples somehow unmanly? Is this "corny"? Is it "mush" as Grumpy says in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs? No, it meets a basic need.

The superintendent of a home for juvenile delinquents said, "Love is a major need of these boys. Their parents will give them a car, but won't say, 'I love you.'" (Webb, p. 125) Some families meet physical needs but neglect emotional needs. Families should learn to be affectionate both in words and in touch. It begins with snuggling and holding the babies and nursing babies the natural way when

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possible. As they grow it may include hugging and embracing, telling them we love them, putting an arm around them, holding hands during prayer, having group hugs, and sympathizing with one another in times of trouble and rejoicing together in times of happiness. It includes remembering special days (birthdays, anniversaries) and giving gifts.

People need a sense of security, belonging, and closeness, as well as physical needs. These needs should be met in the home. Whose duty is it to take the lead to see that family needs are met? It is the father's duty as the leader and provider.

If your parents were not affectionate, you can and should change it in your family. This affection should include all the family members, including the men and boys. Should your family learn to be more affectionate?

[Gen. 27:26,27; Ex. 4:27; 18:7;

Reassurances of love are also especially important after we have punished a child.

It is important for a child to understand that we are not rejecting him, but we object to his conduct. This becomes clear if, after punishing the child, we take time to hold him on our lap, talk to him, and then include him in other activities. Don't make him feel an outcast, but assure him of forgiveness (provided he is truly penitent).

We only have our children for such a short time.

Won't it be a shame if, in our old age, we must look back with regret because our children have grown and left before we took the time to show them that we care? Let us live now so that we won't have that regret later.

"Home"

by Edgar Guest

Home ain't a place that gold can buy or get up in a minute;
Afore it's home there's got t' be a heap o' livin' in it;

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Within the walls there's got t' be some babies born, and then
Right there ye've got t' bring 'em up t' women good, an' men;
And gradjerly, as time goes on, ye find ye wouldn't part
With anything they ever used - they've grown into yer heart:
The old high chair, the playthings, too, the little shoes they wore
Ye hoard; an' if ye could ye'd keep the thumbmarks on the door.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 13:13 - Now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Is your family characterized by love? Surely love is a key element in raising godly children.

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Key #4: Instruction

Many Scriptures tell parents to provide information and guidance so their children can know what is expected. We should teach many aspects of life, but especially we must teach the word of God and its application in their lives. Children, in turn, should heed this instruction.

Proverbs 1:8 - Sons should hear the instruction of their fathers and not forsake the law of their mothers. [Cf. 1 Thess. 2:11.]

Psalms 34:11 - David determined to teach future generations the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 38:19 - The father shall make known God's truth to the children.

2 Timothy 3:15 - From childhood Timothy had been taught the Scriptures because they could make him wise to salvation. [Cf. Eph. 6:4.]

Consider some principles involved in instructing children. As we do so, notice the many other passages that show the importance of instructing children.

I. How Should We Instruct Children?

What methods should we use to instill God's word in our children?

A. Word of Mouth

Genesis 18:19 - Abraham commanded his family after him. He told them what they should do to serve God.

Deuteronomy 4:9,10 - The things the parents know should be made known to the children.

Psalms 78:4-8 - We should tell God's law to the next generation so we can be sure they know it and can tell their children.

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Parents must take time to talk to children about God's word. Explain the teachings and the principles involved. Discuss with them, ask them questions, and answer their questions.

How often do you make it a point to explain God's word to your children? Do they have a thorough understanding of His will for their lives?

[See also Deut. 6:6-9; Psa. 48:13; 71:18; etc.]

B. Example

All people learn by imitation. We learn new jobs by watching others do them, etc. Children especially learn by mimicking parents. Toddlers want to wear our shoes, talk like us, dress like us, etc.

Children need to see their parents living by Bible principles. But remember that they imitate both good and bad characteristics.

2 Timothy 1:5 - Timothy's genuine faith was first possessed by his mother and his grandmother. They did not just tell Timothy what to believe. They showed him by their own faith. "Actions speak louder than words."

Ezekiel 16:44 - "Like mother, like daughter." Most parents want their children to live better than they themselves have lived. This can happen, but it is rare. The general rule is that children are like their parents. If our children are no better than we are, what will they be like?

1 Kings 15:3 - Abijam walked in the sins of his father. Many such statements can be found regarding kings of Israel and Judah. Children often imitate their parents' sins.

And children often go even further in justifying sin than their parents do. We knew a family in the church where the kids grew up hearing the father argue that there isn't anything wrong with drinking a beer now and then. His kids ended up leading the teens in the congregation in drinking parties with obvious drunkenness. This is why parental example is so important.

Nehemiah 13:23,24 - Both parents will influence the children. Jews married people of other nations, and their children spoke half in the language of Ashdod.

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This is one reason why it is so important that a Christian marry another Christian. Children need both their parents to set good examples. Otherwise, the bad example may defeat the effect of the good example. [Matt. 23:1-4]

Genesis 27 and 37 - Isaac and Rebekah played favorites with their children, and Rebekah influenced Jacob to deceive Isaac. When Jacob had children, he in turn played favorites, and his sons in turn deceived him. When you practice evil, you may as well expect your children to practice it too - and they will probably practice it toward you!

If your children imitate you, will they lie, deceive, smoke, drink, gamble, dress immodestly, neglect the Lord and the church? Or will they be honest, hard working, and diligent in Bible study, prayer, teaching God's word to others, and working in the church?

Do you have things about your life that you don't want your children to imitate? If so, you need to change, and do it now!

Woe to us if, by our example, our children are lost eternally. It would be better for us to be drowned than to suffer the fate we will suffer in such a case (Matt. 18:6,7).

C. Practice

Usually people learn best, not just by being told what to do, nor even by watching others, but by actually practicing the activity guided by an instructor. This is the way most people learn to play the piano, drive a car, or participate in a sport, etc. Parents need to teach their children to work by having them help you work. This applies to housework, gardening, making repairs, and work of all kinds. But especially children should learn to serve God by practicing it under their parents' guidance.

Hebrews 5:14 - To discern good and evil, senses must be exercised by reason of *use* (NKJV footnote: "practice"). It is not enough just to speak truth to children, nor even to set a good example before them. We must also insist that they

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regularly practice what is right. This will instill in them the *habit* of doing right and avoiding evil, so they will continue to be faithful throughout life.

Do you insist that your children practice what you teach them till it becomes a way of life with them? Later lessons will discuss **how** to get children to practice what we teach them. The point here is proper instruction requires that we insist that children practice right, not just see us do it.

D. Repetition

With all the methods of teaching we have discussed, frequent repetition is needed. Humans are creatures of habit, and habits develop by repetition. The telling, the good example, and especially the practice all need to be repeated throughout the child's life, so good habits are thoroughly instilled in his character. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 - Parents should talk continually of God's commands. Write them down where you see them frequently. All this involves repetition and reminder.

Exodus 13:8,14-16 - The Passover feast was repeated every year so that the children would remember how God led Israel out of Egypt.

2 Peter 1:12-15 - Sometimes young people tire of hearing parents repeat things, but Peter repeatedly reminded people of things they already knew. To do otherwise he said would be "neglect." He knew they would need these lessons after he died.

When children do something contrary to what their parents said, one of their most common excuses is, "I forgot." Every time a child uses that excuse, he is admitting that he needs to be reminded! Like Peter, someday your parents will be gone and you won't be able to talk to them.

But parents should not let repetition turn into nagging and lecturing. When kids already know something, they will often turn off a long lecture. A short reminder may be all that is needed. Or ask them to explain the matter to you. But make sure they know and that the lessons are fresh in their minds.

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These methods will instill God's will deeply in your children's minds. What about your children - have they been thoroughly instructed in God's ways?

II. When and Where Should We Instruct Children?

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 - We should teach continually (walking, sitting, lying, etc.). Consider some specific applications:

A. Begin Early

A child's character is formed primarily in his early years, so we must begin early to instill God's word.

2 Timothy 3:15 - Timothy knew the Scriptures "from childhood."

Matthew 21:15,16 - Jesus appreciated praise from the mouth of babes and nursing infants. God and His will should be among the very first things that children learn. From the time they learn to talk, they should grow up talking about God.

Bob and Sandra Waldron tell of a mother who took a Bible story book to the hospital to read to her child from the time it was first born. They encourage mothers to read Bible stories when they nurse their babies. The baby won't understand the words but will grow up understanding the importance of Bible study and will always have pleasant memories of it. (*A Generation that Knows Not God*, p. 137)

Some people say, "It's not right to indoctrinate a little child. Let him grow up and decide for himself what he believes."

Or they say, "I don't think you should make a child go to church or Bible class."

However, you can't avoid indoctrinating a child. There is no way to be neutral about God (Matt. 12:30). If you serve God faithfully, then your child will see and

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hear you living and teaching God's word. But if you never do or say anything about God, then you will teach the child that God is unimportant. Either way you are teaching the child about religion.

Furthermore, Satan will attempt to indoctrinate your child. Do you think Satan will wait till the child is grown before he places temptations and false teachings before him? You must begin early to teach the truth, or Satan will win by default! In a garden, good plants must be cultivated, but weeds grow by themselves. So we must teach children the truth early, or Satan will fill their lives with spiritual weeds.

So the fact is that the child will be indoctrinated regardless of what we do or don't do. *The only question is: What values will he be taught?* To fail to teach truth is to guarantee that Satan will teach him lies and cause him to be lost eternally.

The only one who really gains if we don't teach our children early is Satan. And he is the ultimate source of the view that parents should not indoctrinate children. When you hear people say "don't indoctrinate children," you can be sure they are not faithful Christians. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are tools of Satan. God commands us to teach, and to begin early.

When children are small, anticipate later problems, and begin to instill habits that will prevent those problems.

It is a simple fact that proper training when a child is young will help him avoid most of the serious spiritual problems that teenagers face. If a child is going to have a problem, it usually begins in early years; then it grows as the child grows. When teenage years come, it may be too late to change the child. Yes, we should continue to train our teens, but the best way to avoid serious problems is to train them properly long before they become teens!

For example, when I was in the fourth grade, the schools wanted to teach us to dance, but my parents refused. One might reason that a fourth-grader would not be likely to lust. But by starting young, my parents trained me not to dance. When I became a teenager, dancing was never an issue. But if you let a child dance

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when he is young, it becomes far more difficult to get him to quit when the lusts of adolescence come.

The same principle applies in many other areas.

B. Attend ALL Church Assemblies and Classes

This too should begin early in a child's life.

Bring him from the age he is first able to go anywhere. Even though he does not understand what is being said, yet your example will permanently instill the fact that these meetings are very important. (Parents are also learning an important lesson of commitment to God that strengthens them and gives them the assurance they did their best.)

Your child should never be able to remember a time when he did *not* attend church meetings regularly.

Regular attendance should be so routine that the whole family automatically knows that everyone will attend every meeting (Heb. 10:25; Acts 11:26).

There should never be any doubt in anyone's mind where they will be Sunday evening, mid-week classes, gospel meetings, etc. Every family member should view this as a pre-determined appointment.

Less important matters (school activities, sports, musical activities, etc.) should never be allowed to hinder church meetings. That also applies to jobs. Working a job may be good for teens, but they have no God-given obligation to provide for the family like their fathers do. So how can they be justified in missing church for work?

Children should be trained from the beginning to seek first the kingdom and sacrifice for the cause of Christ (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 12:1,2).

Parents should make sure all family members come with their lessons prepared.

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Parents must set the proper example by having their own lessons prepared. They should also check with teachers from time to time to see how their children are doing. Church meetings and classes are only part of the teaching children need, but the least parents can do is to bring their children to meetings on time and well-prepared.

Many parents have been indifferent and irregular regarding attendance, only to find that their children grow up and decide not to attend at all. But by then it is too late for the parents to change them. What a shame!

How regular is your family in attending church meetings?

C. Have Regular, Organized Studies at Home

Every child should have daily Bible study at home.

The primary duty for teaching children rests on parents, not on the church. We need to teach them the importance of regular, frequent study at home. Consider: Acts 17:11 - The Bereans were noble for searching the Scriptures **daily**.

Hebrews 3:13 - To avoid falling away, people need **daily** admonition.

Psalms 1:2; 119:97-99; Joshua 1:8 - We should meditate on God's word **day and night**. (Reread Deut. 6:6-9.)

1 Peter 2:2; Matthew 5:6 - We should hunger and thirst for God's word as a man thirsts for water and as a baby does for milk.

Do these verses describe something to be done just once or twice a week?

Parents should teach their children this kind of daily commitment to Bible study.

Much good material is available to help parents in teaching.

For younger children, many good books and recordings are available for teaching Bible stories.

Parents can review the children's church Bible class lessons with them at home.

You can also order other Bible class material to study with the children at home.

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A good way to memorize Bible verses is to write them on cards, place the cards on the table, and have everyone say them at meals till the whole family knows them.

For years our family read a chapter of the Bible every evening at the supper table. Then we would go around the table asking one another questions about the chapter.

Many good study methods are available. The point is that parents need to spend time on a regular basis, in an organized way, to make sure their children learn God's will.

What about your family - are they being thoroughly instructed in God's will?

D. Teach Informally as Occasions Present Themselves

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 - Note the emphasis on teaching under all circumstances. We should have prearranged studies in which we determine beforehand when and what we will study. But we should also watch for the "teachable" moment that may occur unplanned on the "spur of the moment." Here are some suggestions about informal teaching.

Promote a relationship of open conversation with children.

Before you can help them apply principles of truth to their problems, they need to feel free to bring their problems to you.

This is another area where I made mistakes. I am not a good conversationalist, I often thought I had more important things to do, and especially I let my wife become a mediator between the kids and me. If they had requests or concerns, they went to Karen first. If she approved it, she would defend the kids' case to me. If I disapproved, she would explain my conclusion to the kids.

The effect was to isolate me from my children. Dad was unapproachable. Mom was the only one you could really talk to. And if Mom agreed to something, then the whole group would gang up on Dad to convince him. If Dad vetoed it, then

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Dad became this gruff ogre, the bad guy. The kids were teenagers before I realized my mistake and tried to correct it.

Some suggestions for open conversation with kids:

Take time and be available from early days.

If you take time to talk with them when they are little, they are more likely to take time to talk to you when they are older. Do things together as a family and each parent individually with each child. Plan activities together and make use of informal occasions to be together.

This is another problem area if both parents are employed outside the home or spend too much time on outside activities. Opportunities to establish an open relationship are missed.

Often the "generation gap" exists because parents fail to take the time to discuss children's concerns.

Especially be available at three special times: meal times, when they come home from school, and bed time.

Kids are especially talkative at these times. Ask about their day. Think of topics you can bring up to discuss. Always have at least one meal per day (preferably more than one) as a family and encourage good conversation.

Be involved in their interests.

Attend their ball games, school functions, and musical performances. Get to know their friends. Listen to their music. Watch TV and movies together. Help with their homework. Know what they are involved in so you can discuss with them.

Honestly listen to them and treat their conversation seriously.

Don't try to do most of the talking. Let them talk so you know what interests them and what they are thinking.

If a problem or viewpoint is serious to them, you should treat it seriously as you would with an adult friend. If you disagree, try to reason at your child's level, but don't ridicule or make fun or "talk down" to him. Otherwise, next time he won't come to you with his concern.

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The ability to converse with your children will lead to the following kinds of teaching opportunities:

Teach in response to questions children ask.

Many of Jesus' most memorable lessons came in response to questions. This includes the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29ff), teaching on divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:3ff), and the discussion of the greatest command (Matt. 22:36ff). Likewise children often ask questions that give excellent teaching opportunities: questions about death, prayer, baptism, smoking, etc. When the child asks, he is obviously interested and receptive. Don't just make a brief comment; discuss the matter.

Have religious discussions in the child's presence.

Discuss the sermon on the way home from services or at a meal. Ask each child about his/ her Bible class. Invite visiting preachers or other Christians into your home and have religious discussions.

Don't think children won't learn because "it's over their heads." They will understand more than you think, and later they will remember the importance of these discussions.

And yes, parents should discuss in the presence of the children about problems the church faces. I grew up understanding divorce and remarriage because the church dealt with it in my best buddy's family. Some judgment may be needed here, but too many parents hide church troubles from their children so the children are shocked when they grow up and must deal with problems.

Obviously the children do not need to solve the problems, but they need to grow up knowing there will be problems in the church. And they should learn from their parents' example how to deal with problems.

Discuss circumstances in life that present good moral lessons.

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A circumstance in which someone handles temptation wisely may present a good example to encourage. A car wreck may make a good lesson about obeying the law. A Christian who has problems with a non-Christian spouse may teach the importance of marrying a Christian. Many such examples will arise.

As a teenager I was watching a ball game on TV, when a fight broke out. The camera showed Minnie Minoso calmly sitting on second base, waiting for the game to continue. My mother stated simply that, like Minoso, Christians don't fight. Obviously, the lesson stuck with me.

Discuss Bible principles when the child faces spiritual decisions or when his conduct is spiritually unacceptable.

Don't just tell your children what your rules are or punish him for disobeying rules. Tell them *why* you made the rule, especially if there are Bible principles involved. Discuss the principles with the child. Get the Bible out and look up passages together. When he grows up, he won't have to have you to tell him right from wrong. But if he understands the principles involved, then he can make right decisions for himself.

Obviously not every decision can or should be explained. Sometimes there is no time to discuss a matter. In other cases the child is too young to understand. And sometimes children repeatedly demand to know "Why?" even when you have tried repeatedly to explain. They question the explanation simply because they don't like the rule. We should not give in to such manipulation. But when reasonably possible, we should explain our reasons as a teaching tool. Sometimes it may be useful to test our children's understanding of Bible principles by asking them to explain the principles and make the application to a certain situation. Let them reach the conclusion and explain it to you. Give guidance and additional information, if needed, of course. And never let him reach a wrong conclusion without giving the correct information. But let him learn to think things through for himself.

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Conclusion

I sincerely believe that the majority of Christians neglect to teach God's word to their children as they ought. Many of us let our children face serious temptations day after day at school, on TV, in music, with friends, etc. In many cases, we make mistakes just by the degree of temptation we let them face. But then we make matters worse by neglecting to give them the instruction they need to deal with those temptations. No wonder we are losing so many young people to the world.

When we bring a child into this world, God expects us to instruct that child to do His will. That job belongs to us simply because we are parents, and God will hold us accountable for how well we do the job.

Are we training our children in such a way that we are ready to give answer to God in judgment?

Key #5: Authority (Control)

Authority is the right to give instructions and require obedience.

Our age generally rejects and even despises the concepts of authority, rules, law, and duty.

People insist on doing their own thing, being their own person, and having their own way. As one man said to me, "I don't want anybody telling me what to do." So people demand "freedom" from restrictions. They object when government is firm with criminals or when schools enforce strict rules toward children. They want to loosen the application of God's laws: they object when strict obedience to truth is taught and when those who do not obey truth are rebuked and disciplined. They even object to the concept of a firm God who hates evil and punishes evildoers!

This rejection of authority is especially obvious in the modern concept of the family. How often do you see TV shows, books, movies, or cartoons that portray a father as a capable, responsible family leader? Generally, either he shares authority equally with the wife, or else he is a bumbler, dominated and manipulated by his wife.

Likewise society denies that children should be required to submit to parental authority.

Parent Effectiveness Training, introduced by Thomas Gordon, advocates that parents give up all use of authority. Family conflicts must be resolved by finding a course that is mutually agreeable to both parent and child. Neither is permitted to "impose" his solution on the other. (See the high school text *Parenting and Children*, by H. Westlake, pp. 46-50.)

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The Children's Liberation Movement leads young people to rebel against parents like the Women's Liberation movement led women to rebel against their husbands.

We want the power to determine our own destiny. We want the immediate end of adult chauvinism ... Age might once have led to wisdom, but the old have proven themselves unable to deal with present reality ... the young must take the lead... - "Youth Liberation," Youth Liberation Press, via *Christian Inquirer*, 10/79

Child welfare agencies are often staffed by social workers who believe these modern views. They try to convince parents that they have no right to exercise firm leadership and will be subject to government prosecution if they do! As a result, many children have their own parents "buffaloed." Parents are afraid that, if they cross their children, they will throw a fit, run away, get into drugs, report them to the government, or be taken away by government agencies. The children, not the parents, end up being the dominant influence in the home. Nevertheless, we affirm that proper use of authority is an essential key to successful parenthood.

I. Why Is Authority Important in the Home?

A. Authority in the Home Is Ordained by God.

Husbands have authority over wives.

Ephesians 5:22-24 - The wife should obey her husband as the church should obey Christ. Can the church please God if it disobeys Jesus? No, and neither can the wife please God if she disobeys her husband. This applies in "everything." The only exception would be if her husband required her to sin against God (Acts 5:29).

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1 Corinthians 11:3 - The head of the woman is the man, just as the head of man is Christ.

1 Peter 3:1,5,6 - Women should be subject to their husbands as Sarah was to Abraham. [See also Tit. 2:5; Col. 3:18.]

Consider this quotation from Judge Samuel Leibowitz who was a Senior Judge in Brooklyn Criminal Court:

Young people in Italy respect authority ... That respect starts in the home - then carries over into the school, the city streets, the courts.

I went into Italian homes to see for myself. I found that even in the poorest family the father is respected by the wife and children as its head. He rules with varying degrees of love and tenderness and firmness. His household has rules to live by, and the child who disobeys them is punished.

Thus I found the nine-word principle that I think can do more for us than all the committees, ordinances and multi-million-dollar programs combined:
Put Father back at the head of the family.

The American teen-ager has been raised in a household where "obey" is an outlawed word, and where the mother has put herself at the head of the family. - *Reader's Digest*, March, 1958, via *Plain Truth about Child-Rearing*, p. 7

This description may not accurately describe modern Italy, but the principle is still true, because it agrees with the Bible.

Parents have no basis to expect children to respect their authority, until the parents correct their own relationship toward authority. Children will not respect the father's authority, if he cannot maintain authority over his wife. Nor will they respect the mother's authority, if she refuses to respect her husband's authority. As it was with love, so it is with authority. To relate properly to the children, parents must begin by relating properly to one another.

Parents have authority over children.

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Proverbs 1:8 - A son should hear his father's instruction and not forsake his mother's law.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 - Under the Old Testament, a stubborn and rebellious son, who would not obey his parents, was to be stoned.

Luke 2:51 - Jesus set the example for children by being subject to His earthly parents.

Romans 1:30,32 - Disobedience to parents, like other sins, causes those who practice it - and those who justify others who practice it - to be worthy of death.

Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20 - Children should obey their parents.

Isaiah 3:12 - Describing the wickedness of Israel, God said that children would oppress them and women would rule over them. Likewise our society errs when these oppressive conditions prevail. [Cf. 2 Tim. 3:2; Jer. 35; Phil. 2:22; 1 Pet. 1:14; Prov. 30:17.]

Such teachings make some people (even in the church) feel extremely uncomfortable, but it all comes from the word of God. God made both parents and children. He knows what is best for all. If these views seem overly strict to you, then you should seriously ask yourself whether you have been too influenced by our permissive society.

B. Authority Produces Cooperation and Organization in the Home.

When people work together, organization and cooperation are needed in order to accomplish good. But organization and cooperation require someone to be recognized as a leader with authority. This explains why God ordained authority in every human relationship that He ordained.

Citizens must submit to civil government

See Romans 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13,14.

Imagine what a country would be like if there were no rules, so everyone did as he pleased. We could not even drive down the street: no one would even know what side to drive on or who had the right-of-way at intersections!

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Employees must submit to their employers

See Ephesians 6:5-8; 1 Peter 2:18.

Consider what a business would be like with no supervision. If everyone came and went when they pleased, did whatever they pleased whenever they pleased, how would any business function?

So authority among humans is necessary in order to achieve cooperation.

Someone has to be in charge. Without proper leadership, every effort to work together would be ruined due to indecision. Likewise in the home, someone has to be in charge. God has ordained that the husband is the head, and the children are to submit to the parents.

C. Authority Allows Children to Benefit from the Parents' Wisdom and Experience.

By reason of experience, parents generally have more wisdom than children.

Proverbs 29:15 - A child left to himself (unsupervised) will cause shame. But the rod and reproof will give him wisdom (gained from the parents).

Proverbs 4:10-12 - Because of his parents' instructions, the child is wiser. He can avoid problems and mistakes he might otherwise have.

This gives children a sense of security.

Children generally know their parents are wiser than they are. They know they need guidance at times. They may act confident, but behind the false front they are often insecure. Parental guidance assures the child that he is doing what is best. As a result, children actually have greater respect for adults who enforce fair rules than they have for permissive parents.

To illustrate, consider driving a car across a bridge over a deep chasm. If there were no guardrails, we would be very fearful. With guardrails, we are confident, even though we may be just a few feet from the edge. So the limits set by

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parents give children security. They know their parents will not let them do anything that would be seriously harmful.

D. Authority Molds Children's Character and Habits.

Training children develops character they will maintain even when older.

Proverbs 22:6 - Properly trained children will not depart from their training even when they are old. We are people of habit. We live according to our character and habits.

If we train children to develop good character and habits, they will probably maintain those habits. But habits come by repetition. So parents should insist that children practice what is right till it becomes ingrained.

How can parents get children to practice and develop good habits?

Reasoning with children, by itself, will not always work, even if parents have a good relation with their children. Sometimes the child is simply too young or too rebellious to understand and appreciate our reasons (cf. 1 Cor. 13:11). But if we wait until he understands and agrees with what is right, it may be too late to ingrain the proper habits.

1 Samuel 2:22-25; 3:12,13 - Note that Eli **told** his sons they were wrong - he instructed them. But it wasn't enough. They still would not obey. God rejected Eli's house because Eli did not **restrain** his sons.

What was Eli missing? Authority! He did not properly enforce the rules so as to control his sons and require them to practice good habits and character. Proper control (restraint) will mold the child's conduct so that good qualities and habits will tend to stay with him even when he is mature.

E. Parental Authority Teaches Children Proper Attitudes toward All Authority.

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Adults must regularly relate to all kinds of authority.

We discussed earlier that authority organizes people so they cooperate and work together. This is true in government, work, and the home. To become well-adjusted adults, children must learn how to relate to authority: how to submit to others who have authority, and how to exercise authority when they themselves have it.

If parents seek to prepare their children to be well-adjusted adults, we must teach them proper understanding and submission to authority. How can we accomplish this? The best way is by developing a proper authority relationship between our children and ourselves. This teaches children how to properly submit to authority, and they see by their parents' example how to properly use authority.

Many "psychologists" teach the opposite of this. They say use of authority makes children maladjusted, destroys their self-image, and makes them more likely to rebel against you. So parents become fearful and think, "I don't want my children to rebel and reject me," so we let them have their way. That is drive! It is manipulation and emotional blackmail. God's word says just the opposite. Does He know best or doesn't He?

The main reason so many children today grow up rebellious and maladjusted is simply that they have *not* been properly required to submit to authority. They manipulate their parents, and the parents don't know what to do about it. They get away with rebelling against their parents, so they proceed to rebel against the whole "establishment": parents, government, employers, church, and God.

Instead of teaching them submission, we have taught them rebellion by allowing it to apparently succeed.

The truth is that parents are the primary authorities that children must relate to for their first twenty or so years, and especially for their first five years. If parents do not teach their children to get along with parental authority - if they allow their children to manipulate them and get their own way against their parents' better judgment - most likely those children will always have difficulty relating to authority and will live a miserable life.

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People must especially learn how to relate to the authority of God.

If children do not learn respect for God's authority while at home, likely they will never learn it.

Dr. James Dobson points out: "When a child can successfully defy his parents during his first fifteen years, laughing in their faces and stubbornly flouting their authority, he develops a natural contempt for them ..." The result is that they lose respect for all the parent stands for and believes in, including their religious faith (DTD, p. 12).

God Himself is an "authority figure." To receive eternal life, we must obey Him (Matt. 28:18-20; 7:21-27; Ecc. 12:13; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; etc.). But if a child grows up without learning respect for authority - if he is permitted to rebel against his parents' restraints and get away with it - he will naturally rebel against God's limits and think he can get away with that!

This is exactly the point at which many Christian parents lose their children to the world. This is usually the "bottom line." If you do not restrain your children but let them manipulate you and evade your authority, they will most likely grow up to disrespect God and His will - just like Eli's sons did (1 Sam. 3:13). And God will hold you accountable, like he did Eli.

It follows that proper exercise of authority is not something the parents do to please themselves, but something they do for the good of the child. It teaches lessons that will benefit the child both now and for eternity. This is why use of authority is not contrary to love but is a proper exercise of love.

II. How Should Children Show Respect for Authority?

Some parents don't seem to realize that they have disrespectful children. So what is included in the respect we seek to teach our children?

A. Children Must Act Obediently.

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This is the essence of respect for authority, and this is what many passages previously listed require.

Ephesians 6:1 - Children obey your parents in the Lord. God says, "This is right!" [Cf. Col. 3:20.]

Romans 1:30,32 - Those who disobey parents are worthy of death. [Cf. Deut. 21:18-21; 2 Tim. 3:2; etc.]

In all areas of life that we have studied, respect for authority requires obedience. So a child who persistently disobeys in the home is a child who simply has not learned respect for authority. Yet in home after home - even the homes of Christians - children repeatedly refuse to obey, but parents apologize for it, laugh it off, or simply ignore it like it's an everyday occurrence.

Parents, you are trying to raise *godly* children. The ultimate goal of your authority is to teach your children respect for *God's* authority. **You should expect your children to obey you like God will expect them to obey Him.** Do they?

Do your children obey promptly, or do they procrastinate, make excuses, manipulate, and seek to evade your instructions? Do they obey with an attitude of love and good will, or do they groan, complain, and whine? Do they obey exactly, or do they try to bend the rules and justify partial obedience? Do they obey when you are not watching or only if they know they will get caught? What kind of obedience does God expect of us? If your children have not learned to obey you like they should obey God, then you have work to do. God says it your job to teach it to them!

B. Children Must Speak Respectfully.

Our permissive age allows children from pre-schoolers to teens to say anything, in any tone of voice, and with any attitude. One high school parenting text says parents should allow "children the right to have all kinds of feelings and wishes and to express them freely" (*Caring for Children*, Draper and Draper, p281). Whatever your child feels or wishes is fine, and he has the right to say it.

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That's why we hear little children say to their parents, "No, I won't! You can't make me! You leave me alone! You shut up!" They yell and scream at parents, mock them, and backtalk ("sass").

We are told this "gets it out of their system." But remember, what we repeatedly practice becomes our habit. What such conduct really does is ingrain the habit of disrespect for authority. It makes rebellion a fundamental part of their "system"!

Consider the Teaching of Scripture.

Ephesians 6:2,3 - Children should *honor* their parents. This includes many things, such as supporting the parents in their hold age. But one thing included is speaking respectfully. [Cf. Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 27:16; Ezek. 22:7.]

Matthew 15:4 - Jesus contrasted "honoring" parents to speaking evil of them. He who cursed his parents should "be put to death" under the Old Law (cf. Ex. 21:17). To curse means to express a desire for harm to befall someone. Cursing does not necessarily involve using profanity - though we sometimes hear children do that too! When modern parents refuse to allow children to have their way, children may say, "Oh, drop dead." "Go jump off a bridge." If that isn't cursing, what is it? Is it "honoring" the parent?

Proverbs 30:11,17 - Destruction will come to a son who curses, mocks, or disobeys his parents. Yet parents often tolerate children who rebelliously make fun of them and disobey them.

1 Timothy 5:1 - Do not rebuke an elder, but exhort him as a father. This implies that all people should understand that there are respectful ways to speak to a father, and there are disrespectful ways.

Specifically, parents should never, never let their children say "No" to the parents instructions. This does not refer to when the parent simply asks what the child wants, but when the parent has given the child an instruction. Does saying "No" express honor to the parent? Does it express obedience? May we say "No" to God?

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We should train our children to speak respectfully to us, not for our own selfish pride, but because they need to learn respect! [Cf. Ezek. 2:3-7.]

May a Child Ever Express Disagreement with a Parent's Decision?

Some parents refuse to ever allow a child to express disagreement. This builds rebellion because it is simply unfair. Such an approach assumes parents are always infallible, which is simply not true.

1 Timothy 5:1 said Timothy could speak to an elder as to a father - including telling him he was wrong. But the manner he did it must be respectful. If a child speaks calmly, but simply thinks he has a better idea or just does not understand the parents' decision, discuss with him. Maybe he does have a better idea, or the discussion may help him understand the parents' views. Let the parent consider the child's view, but it must be clear that the child must live with the final decision whether or not he likes it.

But if a child speaks with a rebellious, defiant, disrespectful attitude or tone of voice (parents can tell the difference, and so can children), parents must punish the child's defiance, regardless of the worth of his ideas.

We must teach children that we are willing to discuss if they have a humble, respectful attitude; but rebellion will not be tolerated. [Cf. Matt. 19:19; Mk. 7:10; 10:19; Lk. 18:20.]

C. Children Must Never Strike or Hit Their Parents.

When a child becomes angry or frustrated because the parents don't let him have his way, he may strike them in anger. Sometimes larger children injure or even murder their parents.

Exodus 21:15 - He who strikes a parent would be put to death under the Old Law. ("Smite" does not necessarily mean to kill - cf. vv 18,19).

Proverbs 19:26 - He who does violence to ("assaults" - NASB) his parents is a shame and reproach. [Cf. 1 Tim. 1:9.]

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Parents must begin early to teach children such conduct will not be tolerated. If your little child hits you in defiance and disagreement with your wishes, you must punish that child severely and teach him he never has the right to strike you.

III. Some Specific Suggestions for Controlling Problem Areas

We earlier discussed some of the major forces that often influence young people away from God. Consider some suggestions regarding how can we use our authority as parents to control these forces.

A. Entertainment

What should parents do about immoral entertainment? This applies to television, movies, music, computer games, the Internet, etc.

Realize that the nature of our entertainment does matter.

1 Thessalonians 5:21,22 - Prove all things. Hold fast what is good; abstain from what is evil. God's people must examine what they do and take a stand against evil. [Cf. 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1]

Ephesians 5:11 - And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. Is this entertainment a work of darkness? If so, may we enjoy it and promote it, or should we oppose it and speak out against it? [Cf. 1 Tim. 5:22; Deut. 7:25,26; Prov. 22:3; Rom. 12:1,2; Matt. 18:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:33; Prov. 13:20; Prov. 4:23]

Philippians 4:8 - Meditate on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, etc. Does the entertainment we have studied fall in these categories? If not, why allow our minds to be filled with it? [Cf. also Psa. 1:1; 26:5; Prov. 23:17,20,21; Psa. 101.]

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Evaluate and correct your own entertainment.

Matthew 7:1-5 - Before we rebuke the sins of others, we must correct our own. Are we setting the proper example for our children? Or could it be that the reason they see nothing wrong with immoral entertainment is because of our example? (Matt. 5:16; 18:6,17; 23:1ff; Rom. 2:21ff)

Train children from early years to examine entertainment, and to enjoy wholesome activities.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train children in the right way so they will continue that way throughout life. If from the time children are small, we insist that the family avoid corrupt entertainment, and if we provide wholesome alternatives, children will develop the habit of examining their entertainment, enjoying what is wholesome, and rejecting what is corrupt.

If our children learn to enjoy and appreciate what is good, they are far less likely later to enjoy what is corrupt.

Participate as a family and discuss entertainment with your children.

Too often parents and children enjoy different kinds of entertainment, so they just go their separate ways. Parents don't watch TV with their children and don't listen to their music, so they don't know what their children are involved in.

Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6 - Parents are required to train the children to serve God. We must examine what they do, so we can guide them properly. Sit down together, play their music, play their computer games with them, watch their TV programs, watch movies together, then evaluate them according to Bible standards.

Avoid allowing children unlimited access to TV or radio.

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Develop rules so *you* are in control. Consider eliminating the TV altogether. Or keep it in a closet and bring it out only for special occasions to watch as a family. Do not use TV as a baby-sitter.

Buy, rent, or record video movies, CD's, etc. (these are much easier for parents to control). Preview these with your children. If a song, movie, etc., is unacceptable, tape over it or teach children to turn it off or skip it.

I strongly urge that children not be allowed to have a TV or computer in their own room and not a CD player or radio until they are old enough and prove themselves to be responsible in using it. Then take it away if they abuse the privilege.

Install child-access controls on the Internet and TV. Use TV-Guardian or other such controls to eliminate foul language on TV.

Allow no entertainment that the parents have not specifically previewed and approved. Make sure children know exactly what specific TV programs, tapes, albums, and radio stations are permitted. Try to attend movies as a family.

Before allowing any family member to watch a movie, investigate it for profanity, sexual suggestiveness, etc. There are web sites and other sources that evaluate movies (www.screenit.com).

Limit the number of hours per day or week your child may participate. Initiate a system whereby children must work to earn the privilege of watching or listening. Require all chores and homework to be done first.

In short, control the music and the TV with a vengeance! Use the off button! If you cannot control them, then get rid of them altogether. No entertainment is worth your child's soul.

Remember that you are at war with the forces of evil.

Satan is out to get your children. He succeeds far too often.

Genesis 13:12,13 - Remember the story of Lot. For the sake of material gain, he chose to associate with evil people. Though he himself was grieved by the evil, he did not protect his family from evil influences as he should have (2 Pet. 2:7,8).

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In the end he lost not only all the material possessions, but also his wife, children, and sons-in-law to sin (Gen. 19).

The same is happening to many families today, and one of the main evils that causes many children to be lost is corrupt entertainment. We can overcome the problem. But we must realize we are at war and take adequate defensive measures!

Suppose you lived in the age before television, movies, and tape recorders had been invented, and you knew nothing about them. Then someone came to your home and showed you a typical evening of modern TV or music, or movie videos. What would you do? Throw it out! But today we often allow in our homes that which we really know to be immoral, because we have gradually come to accept it!

B. Peers

Parents need to have a plan, how to deal with this problem.

Here are some suggestions. (You may find other ways, but these are some suggestions that harmonize with Bible principles.)

- * Get to know your children's friends. Have them visit in your home.
- * Never let your children go anywhere, including dates, unless you know the people they will be with, where they are going, when they'll be back, etc.

Illustration: If a stranger asked you to borrow your car, wouldn't you want to get to know the person first? Wouldn't you want assurance where they were going, what they would do, who they would be with, and when they'd be back? Aren't your children more valuable than your car?

- * Train your children, from a very early age, to choose the right kind of friends. Especially teach them the importance of marrying a Christian (and that dating leads to marriage).

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* Give your children opportunities to associate with good young people. Have get-togethers for good children to be together. Don't expect the church to do it. You do it for the good of your children.

* Train your children to talk about the gospel with their peers. It is not wrong to associate with people who are not Christians. Jesus did so, but He did it so He could have opportunity to teach. Children should learn to invite other children to Bible classes, discuss right and wrong, set up Bible studies, etc. If they date non-Christians, let them be these kinds of dates.

* Exercise your authority as parents to determine who your child may or may not be friends with. Young people think, "My folks have no right to tell me who my friends will be." But God says, "Children obey your parents..." (Eph. 6:1) and says parents must train up children to serve God. If parents determine some young person is a harmful influence on their child, they have every right to intervene, just the same as they can make any other decision for the good of their child.

There may be other ideas that help. But the parents are obligated to plan ways to deal with problems caused by peers.

C. Education

Parents must plan how to effectively deal with these problems.

Here are some suggestions. Again, there may other ways than the way we chose. But we are obligated as parents to **deal with it**, not just throw up our hands and do nothing and hope the children turn out all right anyway.

* Investigate what's happening. Visit the schools. Get to know your child's teachers and administrators. Read your child's textbooks. Volunteer to work at school activities. Read books that will help you know what problems to look for in the schools. Investigate school activities **before** your child gets involved. Find out if a class or extra-curricular activity will involve missing services, immodesty, false teaching, etc.

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- * Make it clear to all involved that your child will not participate in certain activities. Write out a list of areas of concern and talk to your child's teacher about them, or have them put in your child's school record: sex education, evolution, abortion, homosexuality, etc.
- * If a problem exists in a class or activity, talk to people in charge and work out an arrangement for your child to be excused or given some other activity, etc.
- * Talk with children at home about matters of concern. Try to get open communication. (But don't rely entirely on this because sometimes children don't talk about their problems).
- * Teach your children the truth diligently and regularly about the concerns they are facing in the schools. Have regular studies at home, etc.
- * Limit your child's involvement in school activities. Schools are increasingly dominating children. They get them younger and keep them longer. They promote day-care, pre-school, kindergarten, after-school activities and sometimes before-school activities. All this strengthens the school's influence and weakens the family's influence.
Instead of this, de-emphasize school involvement and emphasize family and church activities. Have recreation and work together as a family. Worship God together, study His word, and pray, visit in homes of other Christian, attend all church assemblies and classes, visit area gospel meetings, clean the building, do personal work together, help them learn to teach class, etc.
- * Stand for the truth regardless of the consequences. If it means your child's grades suffer or he faces ridicule or embarrassment, so be it. First-century Christians went to prison, were beaten and even died rather than participate in error. Parents must teach children to *sacrifice* and suffer for the cause of Christ.
- * Choose alternative forms of education. Perhaps your family needs to consider a private school or home schooling. These may not work for everybody, but for many people they are a true blessing.
- * Remember God gave *you* the responsibility for training your children to serve Him (Eph. 6:4). And he will hold you accountable. Even when your children are at

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school, *you (not the school) have the ultimate responsibility* for seeing that your child is rightly trained. If the schools cooperate with your authority, wonderful. If not, then it's your job to take whatever steps are needed for the good of your child.

Conclusion

Luke 6:46 - But why do you call Me "Lord, Lord," and do not do the things which I say? The issue of authority is a critical issue facing our society. But the proper attitude toward authority will generally be learned - if it is ever learned - by children in their homes as they relate to the authority of their parents. The way we exercise authority toward our children will very likely determine their eternal destiny.

Are the children in your home learning proper authority relationships?

Key #6: Motivation - Punishments and Rewards

Parents would prefer that their children simply obey them without chastisement. But in practice this does not always happen. Often the child's will conflicts with that of the parent. Then, if the child is to learn respect for authority and do what we believe to be best for him, we must still get them to obey us. How can we lead a child to obey when he would rather not?

The answer is that *parents must motivate the child to obey*. Whatever reasons they have for not obeying, we must give them stronger reasons to obey! This is done by rewards and punishments. When the child obeys, we make him glad by giving him a pleasant experience. When he disobeys, we make him sorry by giving an unpleasant experience. He eventually learns it is to his advantage to obey.

Psychologists call this "reinforcement." It is used in training animals. Obedience leads to a pleasant result; disobedience leads to an unpleasant result. We are dealing, not with animals, but with children who have intelligence and emotional needs. Above all they have a spirit in the image of God and will eventually receive an eternal destiny based on their conduct before God. This is why we already emphasized love and instruction. Nevertheless, the principles of rewards and punishments are useful and Scriptural.

Consider how these principles can be used in training children.

I. Spanking

Many child-rearing "authorities" oppose the use of spanking. Psychologist Linda Budd wrote that, if you spank your child, you should, "Apologize. Own up to your mistake" (via Greg Gwin, *Good News*, 5/28/95).

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A. Spanking Is Taught in the Bible.

God's word commands parents to use spanking when needed.

Proverbs 22:15 - Foolishness is bound in a child's heart, but the rod drives it from him. Children naturally tend to do bad things at times. Parents must exercise authority and give their children rules. But all children, at times, will test those limits. Then punishment is needed to "restrain" them.

Proverbs 19:18 - Chasten the son while there is still hope. This is for his good. Children must be taught obedience while they are young, even before their reasoning ability matures. If you wait till later, they may be past "hope." [See also Prov. 29:15; 23:13.]

Proverbs 13:24 - One who does not spank his son, when it is needed, hates his son. One who loves his son will chasten him. God says spanking is not an act of hatred. On the contrary, *properly done, spanking is an act of love, and those who deny the value of spanking are the ones who God says hate children.*

The issue of spanking boils down to an issue of the authority of God and the inspiration of the Bible. A psychologist may question my intelligence. But when he challenges spanking, he is disagreeing, not with me, but with God. And God is smarter than all the psychologists put together!

Spanking is compared to God's punishment of his people - Hebrews 12:5-11.

God Himself compares His chastisement of people to earthly fathers who chasten their sons. God says that all fathers will chasten their children; otherwise it indicates that the child is illegitimate (vv 6-8)!

Further, this chastening is an act of love, not hatred (v6), because it results in good for the child (vv 10,11). Some claim that punishing children produces resentment and misunderstanding, causing them to hate and disrespect their parents. But God says that discipline leads the child to respect the father (v9).

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It follows that, if parents should not punish children, then God should not punish evil men. But He does punish evil men, and no one is wiser than He is. He is our perfect example of a good Father.

Finally, note that this is a New Testament Scripture. Some people question our use of Old Testament Scripture on this subject; but here is a New Testament Scripture that teaches the same thing. In fact, vv 5,6 quote Proverbs 3:11f. God's teaching on this matter is the same today as it was in the Old Testament!

People who deny the value of spanking, therefore, are denying the wisdom and authority of God Himself. Some don't know this; others do it knowingly. But regardless, to oppose spanking is to directly attack the inspiration of the Bible and the infallibility of God. Parents must understand and appreciate the value of spanking, regardless of what any human "authority" may claim.

[Cf. Rev. 3:19; Deut. 8:5; 28:15; Ex. 7-12; 2 Thess. 1:8-10; etc.]

B. Spanking Works Where Other Methods Fail.

People who deny the value of spanking, offer no workable alternatives.

Some authorities say to "reason" with the child till he agrees.

"Intelligent parents rarely resort to corporal punishment ... An intelligent disciplinary method is the use of reasoning at the child's level of understanding..." - *Growing Superior Children*, pp. 452 (via *Plain Truth about Child Rearing*, p. 26). My translation: "Spanking proves you lack intelligence. If you were smart enough, you could talk them into obeying!"

This statement flatly denies Bible teaching. Reasoning with children is important and should not be neglected, but it has limits. Often immediate obedience is needed, as when a child is playing in the street and a car is coming! Some children are too young and inexperienced to understand the wisdom of the parents' reasons. And often the child is just too stubborn and self-willed to listen. In such cases, no amount of reasoning will change him.

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Dr. Dobson (DTD, pp. 18ff) tells of a young mother who had been taught to reason her child into obedience. When she put her three-year-old son in his crib, he spat in her face. When she tried to reason with him, he repeated it. She finally fled the room as he spat on the back of the door! She said she could never control him after that; as a teenager he rebelled against every request she made. We need to reason with our children as part of our instruction. But there are times when every child determines to have his own way, and no amount of reasoning will convince him. The result becomes a war of attrition, in which the child will continue arguing till he wears you down. He must be taught that "crime does not pay." Pain works wonders.

Again, some suggest that we just "control the child's environment."

We are told to not make demands and children won't rebel. Just remove all temptation and give the children recreation and interesting toys; then they will never want to do bad things. My translation: "Just let the kid have his own way, and there will be no conflicts."

Again, there is value in keeping temptation out of the child's way. But to deny the value of spanking simply contradicts the Bible, and experience shows that it simply does not work.

Matthew 16:24 - To be a follower of Jesus we must learn to deny and control ourselves. The child who is given everything he wants never learns self-sacrifice and self-denial. He becomes self-centered and thinks the world must always adapt to him and give him what he wants. As he grows up, his demands become bigger and bigger, till finally his parents cannot satisfy his demands. His environment cannot always be controlled, so sooner or later he must face temptation and learn to control himself. Otherwise, he is destined for major trouble in life, because he thinks the world owes him a living; but the world will not always give him what he wants. The result is unhappy, miserable delinquents, rebels, and criminals such as flood our land.

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Dr. Dobson (DTD, pp. 14f) tells of another family where the parents always gave their daughter whatever she wanted, never crossed her, and never made demands. She became a selfish and disrespectful teenager, throwing terrible tantrums if she did not get her way. They tried to give a party to please her, but she brought in disrespectful, rebellious friends who proceeded to tear things up. When the mother said something that angered her, the daughter "struck her down and left her helpless" lying in a pool of blood on the floor. The daughter then went out unconcerned to dance with her friends in the backyard. This is an extreme example. But the point is that without spanking and physical punishment child rearing is doomed to failure. Spanking inflicts a relatively mild and temporary pain by means of which the child learns lessons that will teach him to avoid much greater hardships and trouble later in life and in eternity. In this way, spanking benefits the child and is therefore an act of love.

C. Objections to Spanking Are Not Valid.

Some say spanking leads to child abuse or even constitutes child abuse.

The high-school parenting text *Child Growth and Development*, p315, says physical punishment is "unsatisfactory" because, "All physical punishment has the danger of turning into child abuse or causing injury when the adult is really angry. For this reason alone, it should be avoided."

Sweden has outlawed spanking on the grounds that it is child abuse. In this country, schoolteachers are generally forbidden to spank, and some people have tried to pass laws forbidding parents to spank their own children. Often overly zealous social workers harass parents and call them into court, simply because parents exercise Scriptural discipline.

We do not deny that child abuse exists. We deplore it as much or more than others do. But we affirm that scriptural spanking, rather than constituting child abuse, in fact helps to prevent it.

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We have shown by the Scriptures that exercise of Scriptural discipline is an expression of love for children. It is done for the child's wellbeing. In contrast, the child abuser loses sight of the child's wellbeing and acts from selfishness and anger. Such conduct flatly contradicts the Bible and is not what we are defending.

Actually, proper spanking helps avoid child abuse. People abuse children because they do not know how to properly control them. As we have illustrated, the children's conduct frustrates and angers the parent, till finally he loses control and, in a fit of anger and frustration, does lasting harm to the child. If parents would instead learn to discipline their children when the need first becomes evident, the matter would never get so out of hand.

Others say spanking makes the child feel guilty and destroys his self-esteem.

"The chief danger of punishment is that it makes the child feel guilty - that he is bad, naughty" - *The Complete Book of Mothercraft*, p391 (via *Plain Truth about Child Rearing*, p21).

But wait! What if the child has been bad and naughty? What if he is guilty, but doesn't feel guilty? What if he has been disrespectful or has done what could lead him into sin? It sounds like punishment is just what he needs!

A fundamental error of modern psychology is that it often denies evil and guilt. It fails to hold people accountable for their misdeeds. It teaches them to have a high self-image by whitewashing and denying their guilt. But people remain unhappy and maladjusted, because sub-consciously they still know something is wrong. Worse yet, this approach leaves people with no real solution for their problem. The truth often is they are guilty; but by leading them to deny guilt, psychology leaves them with no way to remedy it.

The Bible teaches us to recognize that, when people do wrong, they are guilty and should be told so. If they stubbornly refuse to admit guilt, they should be punished so they suffer for their wrong till they admit it. This is true of children and adults.

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Proverbs 20:30 - Blows and stripes cleanse away guilt and reach the inner depths of the heart. Spanking is not just an external act. It reaches the heart and teaches the child to become an upright, righteous person. It molds godly character.

But the Bible also has a solution for the guilt. When one is sorry, repents, apologizes, and corrects his conduct, he receives forgiveness from God and others who follow the Bible (Matt. 6:12-15; Luke 17:3,4). One reason many people do not appreciate the value of spanking, is that they do not understand God's concept of guilt and forgiveness.

Others say spanking teaches children to use violence.

Sociology Professor Murray Strauss wrote: "Spanking teaches kids that when someone is doing something you don't like and they won't stop doing it, you hit them" (via Greg Gwin, *Good News*, 5/28/95). So supposedly spanking teaches children that "might makes right," and if we are bigger and stronger than others we can get our way by violence.

That may sound reasonable on the surface, but the truth is just the opposite. An undisciplined child is the one who tends to use violence. He throws fits in rebellion against his parents' authority, but he never suffers for such conduct. As he gets older, he learns to throw bigger fits, including physical violence against those who don't let him have his way, just as in the examples we have mentioned. But if instead, when he is small, he is punished for his fits and is not allowed to get his way by such conduct, then he learns that violence does not pay.

Spanking, coupled with love and instruction, teaches children the vital principle that only people in positions of proper authority have the right to punish others. Parents spank, not just to "get their own way," but because they have the God-given authority to train a child for the child's good. Children have no right to punish others, because they do not have authority. Children can learn to see the difference.

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This demonstrates other authority roles, such as God Himself, civil rulers, etc. (Rom. 12:19; 13:1-7). Those who say that spanking teaches children to be violent are, perhaps unknowingly, denying the right of God, civil rulers, and all authority figures to require a penalty of those who flaunt authority.

Others say spanking simply does not work.

"The best that can be said for spanking is that it sometimes clears the air. But it isn't worth the price, and it usually doesn't work" - *The Complete Book of Mothercraft*, p. 367 (via *Plain Truth about Child Rearing*, p. 26.) Parents often make similar statements: "I tried spanking my child, but it just didn't make any difference."

Spanking sometimes does fail, but only when it has been misused. You are not guaranteed success just because you occasionally spank your child. Spanking must be administered properly (see notes below). And it must be used in connection with love, instruction, and rewards, as we discuss elsewhere. And spanking must be used diligently and consistently. You cannot overcome months of improper training with just a few spankings. You will not succeed if you get discouraged and quit trying after a few attempts, nor if you occasionally spank a child for some offenses but then just ignore other times when he is naughty.

Proper training must also begin early. It is possible to wait till a child is so mature that his bad habits are thoroughly ingrained. You still should attempt to use right methods, but it may be too late to change his conduct (Prov. 19:18).

Those who object to spanking fall into one or more of the following categories: (1) they are ignorant of the Bible, or (2) they simply reject the Bible teaching, or (3) they have observed parents who misuse the Biblical concept of discipline.

Anything good can be misused; Satan consistently leads people to pervert what is good. Like fire, electricity, atomic energy, and other powerful forces, spanking can be misused and cause great damage. But the fact there are dangers in these areas does not keep us from using them for the good they can accomplish.

II. Rewards as a Form of Control

Some parents act as though controlling children is entirely a matter of punishment. They never give rewards and sometimes speak as though they think it is wrong to do so. But consider a Biblical defense of using rewards in raising children.

A. Rewards for Our Service Are Part of Life.

Luke 10:7 - The laborer is worthy of his wage, but lazy, negligent workers do not deserve to be rewarded. (See also Matt. 25:14-30; 20:1-15; James 5:4; 1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:17,18; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10).

Men do not work on a job simply for the fun of it. We rightly expect to be paid, and we rightly hope that the people who benefit from our labors will express appreciation.

Parents ought to prepare children to live on their own in the "real world," but when they are on their own they will expect rewards for their labor. Why should we not teach them this by rewarding them as they grow up?

Proverbs 27:2 - Let another man praise you and not your own lips. Children who are not praised may grow up bragging and showing off to get attention. When parents give proper praise, their children learn not to brag on themselves.

B. God Rewards People for Their Service.

Hebrews 11:6 - God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He often rewarded Israel for their faithfulness (Deut. 28:1,2ff). The New Testament promises those who are faithful will receive all spiritual blessings in this life (Eph. 1:3) and eternal life at the Judgment (Rom. 8:14,17; 2:6-11).

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God does not just punish evil, but He also rewards good. This has always been a fundamental part of the Divine nature. If we use the fact that God chastises us as proof we should chastise our children, then shouldn't we also imitate His example of rewarding good? Remember that God is our perfect example of a father. By using rewards as well as punishments, we help children understand the true nature of their Heavenly Father.

C. A Bible Example of Parental Rewards

Luke 15:20-24 - When the prodigal son repented and returned from sin, the father kissed him, rejoiced, and gave a feast in his honor.

One way to reward a child is by letting him work for physical things he wants: money or some item he wants. But this does not mean the child should be paid for everything he does. His parents are already providing him with food, clothes, shelter, etc. If the laborer is worthy of his reward, then the child already owes it to the parents to work in return for all that the parents do for the child! And especially in spiritual matters, children need to learn the value of deferring their reward till judgment day, not necessarily expecting immediate rewards for serving God.

Romans 13:7 - Give honor to whom honor is due. Another form of reward parents ought to emphasize is expressing appreciation and giving praise. This is simply a matter of showing gratitude. (Matt. 25:21)

The nature of the rewards should be a matter of the parents' good judgment. Use your ingenuity. Learn to watch for things your children want. When they ask, "May we do this or go there...", try responding, "If you'll do this work first, then you may." You may promise to read a book to the child after he picks up his toys. As children grow older, perhaps you can pay an allowance for special jobs he does.

The point is to give pleasant results to reward the child for doing good as well as giving unpleasant consequences for failing to do good.

III. Other Useful Methods of Control

I cannot give a complete list of good methods parents can use to motivate children, but I can suggest some possibilities as illustrations. Parents should use their ingenuity.

A. Acceptable Substitutes

If a child has been corrected for some wrong or has been forbidden to do something unacceptable, you may offer him an acceptable alternative rather than leave him disappointed or tempted to do wrong despite your instructions.

If he cannot ride his tricycle because it is raining, suggest some inside game or activity.

If you teach him not to go to the prom, offer him some alternative: a night out with the family or a banquet with other Christian friends.

God uses this method with us. He does not just forbid sin, but tells us the good we should replace it with (Eph. 4:22-32). This approach leaves the child with much less temptation to do wrong, and also teaches him to have a positive outlook and be content even when he cannot get his way.

B. Withholding Privileges

Rewards are given only to those who deserve them. When a child misbehaves, withholding a privilege or reward may be an appropriate punishment. Usually such punishments are most effective if the connection between the punishment and the crime is fairly obvious.

If he doesn't finish his homework (or other job), he can't go out to play but has to finish the homework.

If he misbehaves with his friends, then he cannot visit with them for a period of time. If he does not come when he was supposed to, he is "grounded" and can't go anywhere for pleasure for a while.

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An older teen who uses the car improperly (as by not caring for the car responsibly) may have use of the car withdrawn for a period of time.

C. Apology

Matt. 5:23,24; Luke 17:3,4 - When we wrong other people, the Bible teaches us to go to those people and apologize. Parents should teach children to practice this principle. When the child wrongs another child, an adult, or the parents themselves, the child should be made to apologize.

This also constitutes a good form of discipline because it is not easy to face one we have wronged and admit we were wrong. The child is not likely to soon repeat the act that led to this consequence.

D. Natural Consequences

Some acts naturally lead to unpleasant consequences that teach the child a lesson without the parents' having to punish them.

If a child torments a cat and the parent warns him to quit, he may continue till the cat scratches him.

If the consequences are very severe and if the child would learn the lesson from a lesser punishment, we should prefer a lesser punishment (for example, spank the child instead of letting him burn himself on a hot stove). But sometimes a child simply won't learn from the parents' teaching.

Luke 15:14-17 - The father of the Prodigal Son allowed his son to suffer the consequences of doing wrong. The boy reached the bottom, but nobody bailed him out (including his father). The result is he "came to himself" and repented. Modern parents need to learn this lesson. [Cf. also 1 Sam. 8:9ff.]

Sometimes this method is the only one children will listen to. They may have to learn some lessons the hard way. If they won't listen to us, we should not protect them from the consequences of their wrong.

If a child makes a foolish debt, make him pay it off.

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If he misbehaves at school, don't take his part against the teacher or school authorities. Let them punish him.

If he misbehaves toward a neighbor (as by damaging their property), make him go face the angry neighbor and fix what he broke.

If he breaks a law and the judge fines him, make him work to pay of the fine.

Many parents "bail out" their children when they get in trouble, and the children never learn to be responsible and avoid the foolish conduct. Sometimes the best punishment is to let the child suffer for his error and don't protect him from the consequences.

E. Logical Consequences

Sometimes we can think of a punishment that is logically associated with the wrong deed. It "fits the crime."

When a child accidentally spills or breaks something, spanking usually is not appropriate. Instead, have him clean up what he spilled or pay for a new one to replace what he broke.

If he misbehaves in how he uses a toy or equipment (bicycle), put the toy away where he can't use it for a specified time.

If he mistreats other family members, then he may be isolated from the family as by sitting on a chair in the corner. If children squabble and can't get along, they may be separated from one another so they can't play together.

F. Divine Corrections for Sin

When the child's conduct is sinful, we should use the same methods for correcting him that we should with others. This includes:

Use God's Word to instruct and rebuke them.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 [4:2-4] - Use the Bible to show them where they are wrong and warn them of the eternal consequences of such conduct.

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Make clear that you are acting for the child's good. Don't lead the child to think the Bible is a weapon God provided for parents to get their own way. Show them that this is God's will and they must obey God.

Cooperate with other Christians and the church, when they rebuke the child.

Galatians 6:1 - Sometimes Christians know our children has sinned, so they try to talk to them about it. Parents in such cases may become defensive and try to protect their children. Instead we should realize that this is good for the children, and we should appreciate people who care enough to help. Remember the father of the prodigal, who allowed his son to suffer the consequences of his sin till the son repented.

2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15 - If the child is a Christian who sins and the church exercises Scriptural discipline, we cooperate with the church and respect its decision. The Old Law taught parents to actively participate in congregational punishment of erring children (Deut. 21:18-21; 13:6-11; Zech. 13:3). New Testament discipline takes a different form, but the principle is the same. If the child sins, and we defend them in opposition to those who Scripturally reprove him, we become a partaker of his evil deed - 2 John 10,11.

Pray for the child to do right.

James 5:16 - Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another. When the child acknowledges he has done wrong, pray to God and ask God to help him do right. If he is old enough to be a Christian, then his disobedience to you was also a sin against God. Have him confess the sin to God and pray for forgiveness. (Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:8-10; Proverbs 28:13)

Parents may find other means of motivating children, in addition to those mentioned here. But the principle always is: give pleasant consequences for good behavior, unpleasant consequences for bad behavior.

IV. Guidelines for Proper Use of Punishments and Rewards

To be effective and Scriptural, punishments and rewards must be administered according to certain rules. The mere fact you use spanking (or other punishments) and rewards, does not of itself guarantee parental success.

A. Never Inflict Lasting Damage to a Child.

Remember that your purpose is to punish the child for his good, not for his harm. We seek only temporary pain to change the child's conduct. To inflict lasting harm is not an act of love, does not accomplish the purpose of punishment, and violates the principle that we are not to discourage our children (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

Yet many parents do harm their children. Child abuse is a very definite problem in our society. Literally thousands of children every year are beaten to death by their parents, left abandoned, or otherwise inflicted with lasting harm. All such conduct neglects parental responsibility and violates Scripture.

B. Control Children by Prompt Action, Not by Words.

Some parents try to control children by words. Dr. Dobson (DTD, pp 9,10) gives an example of a woman whose children would run completely unrestrained throughout the neighborhood. Her form of "discipline" was to run out her door from time to time and scream, "I have had it with you; I have had it with you children!" Then she would turn and go back into the house, while her children continued to terrorize the neighborhood!

All of us know such methods are ineffective. But many make the same mistake in other ways. They may nag and harp, threaten and scold: "What's the matter with you, Son. You never do what I say. What am I going to do with you? It seems like

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you're always getting into something. Why can't you do what you're told? Other children obey their parents, why can't you? Etc., etc., etc." "This is the last time I'm going to tell you that this is the last time I'm going to tell you!"

Others try to control children by getting loud or by long lectures. We made mistakes in this area. One of us would get loud and gruff with the kids; the other would repeatedly give long lectures. This may not be sinful, but the point is that it is not effective.

In church meetings we see children misbehave, so parents repeatedly whisper to them, tug at them, shake them, grab them and sit them down. But the problem continues.

The problem is that the child gets used to talk and simply turns it off. It may work at first, but then he learns to gauge how loud, how angry, how long you threaten and scold before you do anything. Then he will push you to the limit. He will pay no attention until you reach the fever pitch where he thinks you are about to take action. The parent gets louder and angrier until finally he ends up having to punish the child anyway.

Further, the parent's verbal barrage often results in a return barrage. We scold; he argues and fusses. We scold louder and longer; he argues and fusses louder and longer. Other family members overhear. The result is that everyone becomes angry, frustrated, and upset.

Proverbs 13:24 - He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him *promptly* (NKJV; cf. Heb. 12:5-11). We think we are showing love for the child by not punishing him, but we would show more love and have a better relationship if we would just punish and get it over with.

The solution is to use *action* to motivate. We should talk to the child *once* enough to make sure he understands what is expected. If he is old enough to understand and if circumstances are appropriate, we should explain our reasons. If he disobeys, we may explain a *second* time to be sure he understands. But if he understands what we want and he just does not *want* to obey, then it is time for *action*, not words.

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If you discipline "promptly," soon you won't have to argue with him. He will obey "promptly," because he now knows that you will back up your words with action. The result of disciplining "promptly" is that eventually you end up disciplining less, and meanwhile you have a much more peaceful home. Arguing begets arguing; action begets action.

C. Always Control Yourself When Disciplining.

Ephesians 4:26 - Be angry and do not sin. Being angry with our children is not necessarily sinful, but if we are not careful it can lead to sin.

When we become extremely angry and agitated, there is danger that we may make decisions that are bad for the child. We may even lose control and cause serious violence and harm. So we really should keep ourselves under control, and administer discipline calmly. But how do we accomplish this?

Interestingly enough, the answer is the same as the last point: ***Take action early, before the situation gets out of hand.*** Obtain action from the child by taking action yourself. He is not likely to do what you say until he thinks you will take action if he does not. So don't keep postponing the action. When the child does something that you will eventually punish him for if he does not change, warn him calmly once or twice. If he does not obey, calmly punish him.

Consistent application of this approach will lead to less arguing, less anger, less upset, and less threatening. But the result will also be ***less punishment***, in the long run. Why? Because when the child learns that you mean what you say, he will act when you tell him to, instead of agitating till you have to punish him. ***By punishing more promptly, you end up punishing less frequently.*** Greater commitment to action leads to decreased need for action. More is less. Yes, you can and should learn to punish children calmly. Remember it: Arguing begets arguing; action begets action.

D. Measure the Effectiveness of Your Methods by the Child's Obedience.

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Ephesians 6:1 - Children *obey* your parents. Obedience is the goal of our training!

Don't judge your effectiveness by how much the child cries, fusses, or throws a fit.

Some parents spank hard enough to cause crying, but not hard enough to cause obedience! They give little smacks that wouldn't hurt anybody. The child fusses so the parents think they've done the job and stop punishing. And the child continues to do as he wants.

Once when my mother spanked me, I told my sister, "It didn't hurt. I just cried so she'd quit." My sister told Mother, and Mother did the job again to make sure it hurt!

The fact a child cries does not prove he is sorry for his wrong and won't do it any more. Some crying is a form of rebellion, protest, or expression of anger. Some children hope their crying will get on their parents' nerves, make them feel guilty, or embarrass them if others hear it. Or maybe the parents will just get tired of all the fuss and trouble, and decide to drop the matter. ***But if the child isn't doing what you told him to do, your job isn't done yet, no matter how much he cries. Punish him some more till he obeys you!***

Determine the methods you use by what WORKS.

Do not automatically resort to spanking. Maybe with a certain child in a certain situation, just a good discussion will solve the matter. Or maybe you can give a lesser punishment or take away a privilege. Different children react differently to different approaches. Learn what works best with each child under various circumstances. ***But use what produces the desired obedience.***

Be sure your rewards are really something the child likes, and your punishments are something he dislikes. In Uncle Remus' tales, Br'er Fox caught Br'er Rabbit and wanted to make him suffer. Br'er Rabbit convinced Br'er Fox that he would suffer terribly, if Br'er Fox would fling him into the briar patch. But when it

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happened, Br'er Rabbit was happy as could be, because the briar patch was his home!

Some punishments are simply inadequate. Some parents spank on a diaper or on an older child's blue jeans. It makes a loud noise, but the child may feel little or nothing. I always pulled my children's clothing up or down and spanked on their bare thigh. It's a punishment. Make sure it hurts!

Sometimes we may think we are punishing our children; but if they don't change their behavior, then apparently they don't consider the punishment to be severe enough.

Continue working on the problem till the child acts as he should.

Never let the child win a battle of wills. With many children there will come a time - perhaps several or even many times - when he will stubbornly set his will against yours and dare you to make him obey. The Bible calls it "stiff-necked." When that happens, you cannot afford to lose that battle.

If you must spank the child a dozen times, he must learn that, when the parent "puts his foot down," then the child is not going to win. This is not a matter of stubbornness and egotism by the parent. It is a principle of authority for everyone's good.

If the child finds out that, if he is stubborn long enough, he can get his way, then he will be ten times more stubborn next time. But if you can prove without question, while the child is a pre-schooler, that what you say is the way it will be, then there will be far fewer challenges to your authority in later years, including the rebellious teen years.

This is not to say we should refuse to listen to reason. If the child can give good reasons for us to change our minds, that is one matter. But we are discussing a conflict of wills in which the child just doesn't want to do what we told him to do. In that case, you must keep on punishing until the child submits. You must not let him have his way! The goal is obedience.

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E. Consider the Reasons Why Your Child Acts as He Does.

How you respond to a child should be determined by why he is acting as he does.

Ephesians 6:4 - Do not provoke children to anger.

You might demand too much because a child is simply too young to understand or be able to do what you asked. Maybe you did not explain clearly enough what you wanted. Maybe he just honestly forgot due to time lapse, tiredness, excitement of circumstances, etc. Maybe he has an unfilled emotional need, and acts as he does out of fear or insecurity or a desire for love and attention. These situations should be handled differently from outright rebellion.

But when the child knows what you want (or ought to know), but he is just rebellious, self-willed, stubborn, and does not want to do what you want, this child must be punished to motivate him to obey.

How can we determine the child's motives?

This is not always easy. It requires thought, experience, and knowledge of the child. Perhaps parents should discuss these matters together. Here are some thoughts to help.

Put yourself in the child's place. When you were his age, how would you have acted and felt in his place? How should you have been handled to produce desired conduct? "Do unto others..." (Matt. 7:12).

Consider how the child would act if he WANTED to do a thing.

Suppose you tell little Johnny to do something, but he fusses and squirms and cries and makes everybody miserable. You may think maybe Johnny is too tired or maybe he's sick. But five minutes later he is doing something he likes, so now he is all smiles and happiness. That proves little Johnny can be pleasant if he *wants* to - it's your job to see to it that he wants to!

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Maybe Johnny says he is too sick to go to school. But then he wants to stay up and play with his toys or go outside and play. When I said I was too sick to go to school, my mother made me stay in bed all day to get better!

So consider whether he is capable of understanding, remembering, and accomplishing the thing you asked of him if it were something he wanted to do. If the answer is "yes," then your job is to give him sufficient reason to want to!

F. Generally Children Should Be Disciplined in Private.

Sometimes a child misbehaves in public places, other people's homes, or in the presence of company. Disciplining him around other people may embarrass him, you, and the other people. And in today's society so-called child advocates may harass you. But if you don't discipline the child, he soon learns he can misbehave around other people without consequences.

One solution is to call the child to you and inform him as privately as possible what you want (whisper, etc.). If firmer measures are needed, find or ask for a private room. (This could be a rest room, a bedroom, a car, etc.). Take the child there and proceed to discipline as you would at home. If he is old enough to understand, you may tell him you will discipline him when you get home.

Suppose a child is being noisy or otherwise disruptive during a church meeting. Some people think, if they take the child out, it will be embarrassing or will disturb others. But by not disciplining the child, they make matters worse because the child continues to disrupt other people.

When your child is distracting other people in worship assemblies, take him out and solve his problem. Then bring him back when he is under control so he will not distract others.

G. Never Offer a Child a Reward to Stop Misbehaving.

If he is already doing wrong, and you offer a reward to quit, then you have really rewarded and reinforced his misbehavior. Next time he wants that reward, he will misbehave hoping to receive the reward again.

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Suppose you call Billy to come and he says, "No, I won't!" So you offer him candy if he'll come. What will happen next time you call him? He'll remember that, if he says "No," he may get some candy!

The time to offer a reward is before the child has done anything wrong, while you are asking him to do something good. Or just give him the reward after he did the good deed, but don't wait till he's already doing something wrong and then offer him a reward to quit.

H. Talk to the Child Before and After You Punish Him.

Discuss the incident. Explain why it was wrong and what the child should have done. After the punishment, make sure the child is sorry: make him say he's sorry and make him promise to do right next time. If he has refused to do something you told him to do, take him back and make him do it. Then be sure to tell the child you love him and you expect him to do better next time, etc. There are many advantages to this.

(1) It helps you keep calm.

(2) It makes sure the child understands why he is being punished and what you expect in the future.

(3) It helps him remember the lesson. You certainly have his attention, so it is an excellent time to instruct him.

(4) It enables you to assure him of your love and concern for what's best for him. You make sure he understands that you care about him, but you must not allow that kind of conduct.

(5) Often your talk will cause the child to feel bad just by the fact he knows he has disappointed you.

Gwendolyn Webb says to "make a spanking an event" (TUAC, pp. 168-170). She means don't just keep scolding a child and smacking him so the situation gets drug out repeatedly. Take him out, talk to him, give him a spanking, make him apologize and do what you told him, etc. Make it an event he will remember, so he is not likely to make the same error again.

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Conclusion

Romans 11:22 - Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. God is a God of both rewards and punishments. He is our example of a good father. We should consider the principles He uses to motivate obedience and apply those principles in our homes according to the Scriptures.

Key #7: Consistency

Consistency is defined as "steadfast adherence to the same principles."

We have already learned six "key" principles we must follow in order to raise godly children. But it is not enough to just *understand* and be aware of these principles. We must *consistently* apply them - we must "steadfastly adhere" to them, and we must continually apply the "same principles" without variation. This applies to all six areas we have already discussed:

- (1) We must consistently keep our *purpose* before us and take all actions with that purpose in mind: to raise our children to serve God.
- (2) We must consistently *plan* our actions in harmony with God's word, and put our plan into action.
- (3) We must consistently act in *love* for the whole family, making our decisions according to what is best for all.
- (4) We must consistently *instruct* our children to know God's will.
- (5) We must consistently use *authority* for the good of all, expecting obedience and respect from children.
- (6) We must consistently *motivate* our children to obey us by means of proper, diligent application of punishments and rewards.

We are not saying to just be consistent, regardless of the principles you follow. It is possible to be consistently *wrong!* We must learn the *right principles*, then we must steadfastly adhere to them.

Lack of consistency is one of the biggest problems facing parents. We often fail, not because we do not know what to do, but because we are not diligent in applying consistently what we know.

Note some specific areas in which consistency is needed but is often lacking.

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I. Consistency Between Parents

Both parents must "steadfastly adhere to the same principles." They must work together, not against one another.

A. Sometimes Father and Mother Disagree about Raising Children.

Sometimes they disagree about what rules the children should be required to follow or about how the children should be punished. They may even argue about matters like this in front of the child.

Typically, one parent is strict and the other is lenient. The lenient one thinks the child is being treated too harshly, so he/she compensates by being increasingly lenient to make up for the strictness of the other parent. The other parent sees this and reacts by being even stricter to make up for the leniency of the other spouse. It becomes a vicious circle in which the parents pull further and further apart.

The child is completely confused by this. One parent punishes him, while the other parent protects him. He doesn't know what the rules are. He has no sense of security, but becomes the pawn in a power struggle between the parents. But he soon learns to play the parents against one another. He goes to the parent who will let him have his way and uses that one to protect him from the other parent.

But the end result is the child really does not respect *either* parent. If they cannot decide the rules, why should he listen to them? Often great strife results within the family. And most tragically, the child does not grow up to learn the qualities of character that either parent wants him to learn.

B. The Bible Deals with This Problem.

A Bible example: Gen. 27.

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Isaac determined to bless Esau, but Rebekah wanted the blessing to go to Jacob. Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac and cheated Esau of the blessing. The result was strife between Jacob and Esau so severe that Esau determined to kill Jacob, and Jacob had to flee from home.

1 Corinthians 14:33

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. The result of such conflict between parents is sure to be strife, not peace. God is not the cause of it and does not approve it.

Matthew 12:25

A house divided against itself shall not stand. But a house is surely divided when parents are so inconsistent and disagreed about raising the children. It cannot possibly accomplish its real goals.

Ephesians 6:4

Parents should not provoke children to wrath. But such inconsistency between the parents invariably causes wrath and discouragement on the part of the child.

C. The Bible Solution

Communicate.

Go back to step #2 - ***planning***. Discuss the matter between yourselves based on the principles of God's word.

Even before marriage, you should discuss your basic approach to child raising. If one of you is fundamentally more lenient than the other or if there are other fundamental disagreements, this needs to be discussed and an understanding reached. Otherwise, marry someone else.

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As you raise the children, continually discuss the principles you will follow. Try to decide the rules you will follow even *before* the problem comes up. Then there will be no need to argue at the time of the problem.

Communicate with your companion about specific situations. If you give a rule to the children, tell your spouse about it so he/she will know; then the children cannot play you one against the other.

If you have a disagreement about how to handle a specific situation, don't argue about it in front of the child. The father and mother should go into another room for awhile to talk about it.

Follow the Bible plan for authority in the home.

Ephesians 5:22-25 - The husband is head of the family, but he must act in love according to what is best for the family. Let the parents discuss the matter. Let the wife express her view respectfully. If appropriate, let the children express their views. Then let the father make a decision.

When the decision is made, the whole family should accept and honor it unless it requires the wife or children to do something sinful (Acts 5:29). There should be no nagging, grumbling, or pouting. Specifically, the wife should submit to this decision with the same good will that she wants the children to submit to her authority.

II. Consistency Between Words and Deeds

Parents need to adhere steadfastly to the same principles both in what we *do* compared to what we *say* we will do. This is especially important in the rules we make and in how we enforce those rules.

A. Some Parents Make Threats or Promises They Do Not Keep.

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We tell our children they must do certain things; but if they stall or manipulate or flat out rebel, we don't make them do it. We may threaten a punishment or offer a reward, but then we don't keep our word. "If you don't ..., I'm going to ..." (or "If you will ..., then I will..."). But we don't do what we said.

Some parents make ridiculous threats that everyone knows they don't intend to carry out (and if they did carry it out, it would be sinful). "If you don't do what I say, I'll break every bone in your body." Such threats may be made in humor, but often the parent appears to be quite serious and hopes the threat will lead the child to obey.

Such statements often occur when parents are trying to control children by threats and anger, instead of by action (consider our earlier discussion about "Motivation"). We need to consider whether it is right to threaten to do something that would be sinful if we did it. But we also need to consider whether it is right to make threats or promises that we do not keep and in many cases have no intention of keeping.

B. Bible Principles Involved

Hebrews 10:23 - God is our example of a perfect Father, and He is faithful to His promises. We are motivated to obey Him because we know He will always keep His word. If we could not trust Him to keep His promises, we would have little respect for Him and little reason to obey Him. Parents should be likewise faithful to their promises.

Romans 1:31 - Listed among those worthy of death are "covenant-breakers" (NKJV - "untrustworthy"). People who make promises they don't mean or who give their word but don't keep it, are covenant-breakers or untrustworthy. Note that this is true whether we promise to give a reward or a punishment.

James 5:12 - Let your yes be yes and your no, no. Do not lightly say you will do a thing. If you don't mean it, don't say it. If you say you'll do it, then do it. This is true of both your "yes" and your "no."

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We tend to think we are obligated to give the rewards we promised our children, but it's OK to forget the promises of punishment. After all, the children don't want us to keep that kind of promise! But a promise is a promise, whether we promise a reward or a punishment. We must keep our promises; otherwise we are not being true to our word, and our children will not truly respect us.

Colossians 3:21 - Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Failure to keep their word is one way parents commonly provoke their children and discourage them. One time they keep a threat or promise they made, but the next time they do not keep their word. Children do not know whether or not to believe and trust such parents.

There are times when we make a poor decision and promise something, then later we realize it would be best for everyone if we change our mind. In that case, let us apologize for our mistake and explain our reason for changing. But don't lightly make threats or promises and do not lightly break them.

III. Consistency Between Children

Parents should not play favorites with their children, but should "steadfastly adhere to the same principles" regardless of which child they are dealing with.

A. Some Parents Are Partial to a Particular Child.

Sometimes parents just like one child better than the others or play favorites for some other reason. So they may be more lenient with one child. The favorite can do what is forbidden to others, or he or she is not punished as severely as another child would be for the same violation. The favorite may receive gifts or favors that the others do not, etc.

Note that this does not mean we should ignore the fact that different children may have different circumstances. Sometimes children quickly and unfairly accuse parents of favoritism simply because one child is allowed to do what other children are

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not allowed to do, etc. But sometimes rules are justifiably different because of different circumstances.

For example, if one child is older, he may get to stay up later or go places the younger ones cannot go, etc. The point is that rules should be the same for all children in the same circumstances. And the rules should not be different just because we like certain children better than we do others.

Favoritism harms all the children. The ones who are discriminated against become rebellious. They are jealous of the favorite and angry at the parents. They feel unloved and may deliberately disobey parents to get attention. But the favorite is also hurt because he grows up thinking he deserves special treatment. He thinks he is more important than other people and can break the rules and get away with it. He will have great difficulty adjusting to real life, because the world won't treat him that way. And God certainly won't treat him that way.

B. Bible Principles Involved.

Bible examples show the consequences of favoritism.

Isaac and Rebekah each had favorite children. Isaac loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). This resulted in such strife and deceit that Esau sought to kill Jacob, and Jacob to have to leave home.

Genesis 37:3,4 - Later Jacob also played favorites, which caused hatred between his sons. His favorite son was Joseph, so the others sold Joseph as a slave and almost killed him out of jealousy.

Acts 10:34,35 - Our heavenly Father, who is our perfect example of a father, does not play favorites. He does not respect persons, but treats us entirely according to how we act toward Him. Especially in administering rewards and punishments, God treats us on the basis of our conduct with no partiality shown (Rom. 2:11).

James 2:1,8,9 - Likewise, God forbids us to show respect of persons. Partiality violates the Royal law, which requires us to love our neighbor. Partiality is sinful

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just as surely as murder or adultery, yet many people are guilty right in their own homes!

Colossians 3:21 - Again, we must not provoke our children to discouragement. But one of the surest ways to discourage them is to treat them unjustly and unfairly. And one of the surest ways to be unjust is by practicing favoritism. [Matt. 7:12]

IV. Consistency Between Circumstances

We must "steadfastly adhere to the same principles" in the same circumstances *every time*. We must not allow what we disallowed in the past under the same circumstances.

A. Sometimes Parent's Rules and Enforcement Are Not Reliable.

Sometimes we let our own mood, rather than the child's conduct, determine what the rules are or what discipline we give. If we feel bad or had a bad day, we take it out on the children. We scream and punish them for little things. But the next day we're in a better mood, so they get little or no punishment when they do the same things.

Sometimes parents are too busy with other things and just don't pay attention to their children. We give them instructions; but then we get so involved in work or conversation that we overlook their disobedience. If we notice them, we correct them. But at times we are not diligent enough to check up on them.

As a result the child learns that, whether or not he gets punished, will depend, not just on what he does, but also on the parents' mood or involvement in other things. So it is a calculated risk on his part whether or not he can get away with disobedience. Or he becomes an amateur psychologist and tries to judge our moods. But what we have taught him is, not respect for authority, but manipulation of it.

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B. Bible Principles

Hebrews 6:10 - God is not unjust. Jesus is the same today as He was yesterday (Heb. 13:8). He is not divided against Himself (1 Cor. 1:13).

How does our heavenly Father deal with our disobedience? Does the punishment we get depend on the mood He is in? Does He get so involved in other things that He overlooks our sins? God is the perfect example of consistency in dealing with our wrongs.

Matthew 23:23 - Justice is one of the weightier matters of the law. This includes justice toward our families. When rules are not enforced consistently, that is injustice. We would object if we were to receive that kind of treatment by the civil government or an employer. Let us practice justice by enforcing rules fairly.

Colossians 3:21 - Again, we must not provoke our children to discouragement. Inconsistent enforcement of rules is one of the greatest causes of wrath and discouragement in children. Today the child is punished severely for doing the same kind of thing that he did yesterday with little or no punishment. This is unfair, and the child knows it.

Obviously, humans are limited in our ability to know every wrong our child does. Whereas God has perfect knowledge, at the best we are capable of being fooled at times. Children know this and do not disrespect us simply because occasionally things happen that we cannot know.

But the problem often occurs simply because we are not *trying* hard enough. We are too concerned for our own moods and our own interests, so we are not concerned enough about the conduct and training of our children. As a result, they deliberately and knowingly get away with disobedience, because we are not "on the ball." That is injustice.

Consistency is the key that ties together all the other keys. We must be consistent in applying all the principles we have studied - "steadfast adherence to the same principles."

Conclusion

Raising Godly Children

Parents must practice each of the "key" principles that we have studied. But note further that, *if we practice each of these "key" principles, we will find that each of them in turn will instill a related quality in our children.*

- (1) If raising our children to serve God is our main **goal**, then the children will develop serving God as their main goal.
- (2) If we **plan** our training of the children based on God's word, then our children will learn to plan their lives on the basis of God's word.
- (3) If we always act in **love** for our children, then our children will learn to act in love for everyone around them.
- (4) If we diligently **instruct** our children in God's word, they will develop, not only an understanding of God's word, but also a desire to in turn instruct others.
- (5) If we properly exercise **authority** toward our children, this will instill in them a respect for authority and an understanding of how to exercise authority when they need to do so.
- (6) If we **motivate** them by proper use of punishments and rewards, then they will learn to seek the rewards and avoid the punishments offered by God (and other authority figures).
- (7) If we are **consistent** in applying these principles in training our children, then they will learn to do right consistently. Because we demand right conduct all the time, they will learn to act right all the time, not just part of the time.

Raising children is one of the most awesome responsibilities any human being can face. Our conduct as parents will influence our children, not just for life, but for eternity. You and I will largely determine how our children live their lives and where they will be in eternity.

Yet many parents face this responsibility with far too little concern and far too little understanding of proper principles. We emphasize again that our goal as parents must be to *raise godly children*. While many people do not know how to do this, there is no need for us to be ignorant. God's word tells us the principles we should follow. To successfully raise godly children, we must understand and practice God's keys for raising children.

Raising Godly Children

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