

## Christian Parenting

**Ephesians 6:1-4**

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We have been exploring what the Bible teaches us about marriage, and we end this series today with a look at Christian parenting. Parenting by itself is an awesome responsibility and greatly rewarding task (most of the time). But our focus this morning is not parenting per se, but specifically Christian parenting. The presumption of this text is that children and parents are doing what they do “in the Lord.” In other words, they are practicing Christians. That is the first task of Christian parenting: to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and dedicate yourself to a life of love in the Spirit. This is the spiritual basis of Christian parenting, without this we are down to Psychology 101.

I want to speak a word of encouragement to parents who are hurting because their children are not living up to their expectations, or worse, have turned out to be self-destructive rebels. Parents often take full responsibility for the way their children turn out, and this is the source of gnawing guilt and humiliation as parents brood over their failures. This guilt becomes especially pointed when they compare their kids to others who earn straight “A”s, receive all kinds of awards and excel in sports, music and good citizenship. Where does this guilt come from? It comes from false beliefs. Jesus said a bad tree yields bad fruit (Matthew 7:17); meaning false teaching leads to brokenness and pain in your life. In psychology, the false belief of many Christian parents is called *determinism*. This is the belief that newborn children are blank slates and whatever they become is the direct result of the forces that act upon them. It is a simple equation: input=output. Therefore the parents are guilty for every bad outcome in their child. This is a false teaching and a false belief, and if you subscribe to it, even a little, the devil will use it to destroy your soul with shame and guilt.

Children are not blank slates when they come out of the womb. The Bible says that each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made; woven together in the depths of the earth by God who also formed our inmost being. (Psalm 139:13-14) That is to say that children come with a temperament and a personality all their own. God also gives to each one a will of their own to judge, decide and choose their reactions and behaviors. In the Garden of Eden, God was the perfect parent to Adam and Eve. They had all the perfect input from their heavenly Father and

yet the outcome was not so good! Or take the parable of the prodigal son as told by Jesus (Luke 15): two sons raised in the same way by the same Father. One becomes a model citizen, and the other moves away and lives in a brothel. Some of the very best parents I know who have been role models to me have suffered greatly when their grown children made poor decisions and gave themselves to self-defeating behavior. Every parent should clear away the false teaching from their heart. And those of us who like to judge and condemn other parents because of their kids should do the same. No parent is responsible for the final outcome for their child. The Bible makes each one of us responsible for our own lives: "...the son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him." (Ezekiel 18:20) Christian parents discard the guilt that comes from believing in deterministic psychology.

The most distinctive aspect of Christian parenting is your own Christian character. Set aside for the moment the parenting manuals with all of their techniques, strategies, and tactics. Forget sending away your \$19.95 to that guy on the radio who promises to cure your children of back-talk in 60 seconds. The #1 influence you have on your children is the power of unconscious example. Jesus said in Luke 6:45, "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." If you have a passion to know and serve Jesus Christ, if you have a craving and a burning thirst to experience God in your life, it will unfailingly spill out of you in all kinds of unpremeditated ways. Your children will not be influenced by your communication tactics; they are influenced by who you are. The only influence that makes a difference is authenticity. If you have an authentic joy in God and God's ways, you will bless your children.

This is how it worked for me. My parents read Dr. Spock back in the 50's and 60's. But now his books are all out of print and nobody knows who he is anymore. What I remember most distinctly about my parents is their authentic Christian faith when I was growing up. They prayed out loud. They served on purpose. They worshipped. They discussed the Word at the dinner table. Your greatest leverage as a parent is to wildly and enthusiastically pursue your personal relationship with Christ like my Labrador goes after a squirrel in the backyard. This act of being Christian far outweighs all the deficiencies you may have in technique.

I want us to attend to two words in Ephesians 6, verse 4: *training* and *instruction*. Training is a word that comes right out of the Olympic Games. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:25-27 says, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but

we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

To train requires a plan: specific times for practice, specific tasks to be completed and specific goals to be obtained. Christian training for your child should not be aimless, random or left to chance. Sunday school is not enough and was never intended to replace the parent’s role in teaching the faith. A plan might include things like the use of a Bible story book or the Bible; family prayer times; Sunday worship; nature walks together; service projects or attending a Christian family camp. The Bible does not dictate a plan for us, but it does urge us to make one!

The second word here is instruction. There is a whole book of the Bible devoted to parents instructing their children; it is called Proverbs. Hear Proverbs 1:8-9, “Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck...” One nice thing about the book of Proverbs is that it has 31 chapters, which lends it to daily reading and study on a monthly cycle. What a great curriculum for parents to instruct their children!

Paul commended Timothy’s parents because of “how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:15) Martin Luther urged every father to teach his children the Ten Commandments, The Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. For centuries every Christian child in Germany knew these scriptures by heart and could tell you their basic meaning.

So, what have we learned? First, we have learned not to give ourselves to false teaching and false guilt over our children. Second, we have learned that parents should regard themselves as the primary providers of Christian training and instruction. And finally, we have learned that our greatest task as Christian parents is to stay in love with Jesus Christ.