

Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives

Biblical Leadership and Parenting

Note: The following paper is the second in a two part series on biblical leadership in the family. Please read "Biblical Leadership in Marriage" before reading this paper.

One of the greatest challenges facing Christian parents today is raising their children in a society filled with immorality and endless philosophies. This paper seeks to examine the biblical roles of leadership within parenting.

Fathers:

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul writes,

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

In this verse we can make several observations:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger

In the beginning of verse 4, God clearly places the responsibility of spiritual training upon the father. When the father is not a believer or is no longer with the family, the believing mother assumes the role as the spiritual leader of her children (2 Timothy 1:5).

In the original Greek, the phrase "*Do not provoke you children to anger*" is a command that literally reads, "Stop continually provoking your children to anger." Although godly parenting can result in a child becoming angry, in this verse the provocation is caused by the father's sin. What are some ways the father can wrongly provoke his children to anger?

- Correcting the child while the father routinely practices a greater sin (Matthew 7:3).
- Treating one child differently than another (Proverbs 20:23).
- Judging a child's actions before the whole story is known (Proverbs 18:17).
- Reminding a child of past sins that were supposedly forgiven, for the purpose of manipulation (Matthew 18:23-35).

Children of every age can sense hypocrisy when it exists in a parent's training. The only way to avoid this hypocrisy is for the parent to first examine his own life for sin before attempting to address a sin issue in his child's life. Jesus addressed this principle in Matthew 7:3-5:

"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 'Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 'You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.'"

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

In this portion of the verse, we can make three important observations:

1. The phrase "*bring them up*" is an imperative present verb which literally means to "continually nourish or feed them." This phrase reminds the father that spiritual training occurs on a continual basis.¹
2. To understand the phrase "*in the discipline and instruction*" we first examine two words.
 - A. The Greek word for "*discipline*" is defined as "discipline, instruction, training." It is used several ways in the New Testament. It describes the formal education of Moses and Paul (Acts 7:22; 22:3). It is used to illustrate the grace of God instructing believers (Titus 2:12). It describes how the Word of God trains believers in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It is used to express the corrective discipline of God (Hebrews 12:6, 7, 10).
 - B. The Greek word for "*instruction*" comes from the root word which means "to set the mind." In this verse, it conveys the idea of admonishing or warning someone. Therefore, the phrase "discipline and instruction" conveys instruction, training, admonition, and discipline.
3. Lastly, the phrase "*of the Lord*" explains the source of the father's training. The father's instruction, training, admonition, and discipline are to come from God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17).²

¹ For an example of the father continually nourishing his children, see Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

² For further discussion concerning the authority and sufficiency of God's Word, see the paper entitled, "The Authority and Sufficiency of God's Word."

Mothers:

While God's Word doesn't provide specific instructions to the mother in regards to teaching her children, it is clear that the father and mother play a collaborative role in this training process. In Proverbs 1:8, Solomon describes the father's and mother's instruction as being equal in influence. He writes, "*Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching;*" In Ephesians 6:1-2a, the mother is shown to have the authority and respect of the father, while playing an active role in the raising of children: "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER...*" By virtue of the unity found within their marriage, the father and mother are to work in harmony together (Ephesians 5:28-31).

Children:

The desire of parents is that each child would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and live their lives according to Word of God. There are several passages that describe this relationship:

- In Ephesians 6:1, Paul exhorts the children to obey their parents by means of their relationship with Christ. He writes, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*"
- In Colossians 3:20, we find this obedience is to be motivated by a desire to please their Lord: "*Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.*"
- Proverbs 6:20-23 explains the benefits of a child embracing God's Word as the authority in their life: Solomon writes, "*My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.*"
- In Ephesians 6:2, the Apostle explains to children that obeying their parents brings about a blessing from the Lord: "*HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.*"

While every believing parent desires to see their children place their faith in Jesus Christ, it is important to recognize that salvation is dependent upon the Lord choosing those on whom He will have mercy (Romans 9:15-16).³ The roles and responsibilities of biblical leadership in parenting are unconditional and not dependent upon a child's faith or response to God's Word.

Conclusion:

The spiritual leadership in parenting clearly rests on the shoulders of the father. While guarding against provoking his children to anger through sin, the father is to train and nourish his children using the Word of God. While God's Word doesn't provide specific instructions to the mother in regards to teaching her children, it is clear that the father and mother play a collaborative role in this training process. The instruction of the father and mother are to be equal in influence, resulting in the children responding in obedience and respect. These roles and responsibilities of biblical leadership in parenting are unconditional and not dependent upon a child's faith or response to God's Word.

Parents are responsible for the spiritual raising of their children. The local church is not to usurp this parental responsibility. Therefore, children and youth ministries within the church should promote parental involvement and be seen as a resource to further enhance the parent's ongoing daily instruction. There is a great temptation for fathers and mothers to delegate their God-given responsibilities to their local church or an organization. Yet the father and mother, when Spirit-filled and equipped with the Word of God, are completely qualified to perform these tasks.⁴

"Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives" papers represent an overview of various Bible doctrines. Each paper contains biblical truths that often set TVBC apart from other churches and religious organizations. We invite the congregation's biblically based feedback as we seek to accurately handle the Word of God.

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³ For further discussion about the election of God, see the paper entitled, "The Depravity of Man and Sovereignty of God in Salvation."

⁴ For a further discussion about walking by the Spirit, please see the paper entitled, "The Spirit-Directed Life."