

## Raising Godly Children – 1: Spirit vs. The Flesh

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Tricia and I have reached the point in our lives where our kids are grown—we are empty nesters.
  - A. Although we will always have the responsibility to seek to guide them in the right way, they are now making their own decisions and will have to answer for them.
  - B. So, as for experience I guess I have had about as much as most anyone, some of it good and worthy of emulating, other parts less than spectacular...parts I wish I could do over.
  - C. Therefore, what I want to do in this series is **not** to give personal advice (although certain bits of my experience might be insightful at times), but to address biblical principles concerning raising godly children in our very secular and ungodly world.
  - D. My hope and belief are that because these lessons are scriptural they will be helpful to all who will apply them to life, especially parents and their work of raising children.
2. In this lesson I would like to consider the biblical perspective or approach needed to help children cultivate a *spiritual life* that will please and *glorify God* and bring them real happiness.
  - A. This means training children to put God first over things the *world* wants them to do, things it claims they must do, things *they* may want to do, or things even *you* may want them to do.
  - B. It is a training that says only when God is first will one have true happiness.
3. This training is an eternally serious matter (Rom. 8:5-8 – “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is **death**, but to set the mind on the Spirit is **life and peace**. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**.”).
4. So, your approach toward biblical spirituality in raising your kids will have significant impact on whether they grow to be God’s friend or His hostile enemy, which has eternal consequences!
  - A. So, I want to consider two basic points relating to raising spiritually minded children.
  - B. These two things are 1) that true spirituality comes through teaching our children to love God and 2) by enforcing one unbending rule.

### BODY:

#### **I. Spirituality begins with learning to love God**

- A. A scribe once asked Jesus what was the first, or greatest, commandment of the Law (Mk. 12:29-30 – “Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; <sup>30</sup> and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.””).
  1. Here Jesus showed that God desires, even under O.T. law, for us to have a **relationship** with Him.
  2. First, it is a relationship of singular devotion and understanding that God is the **one and only Lord, Jehovah** – the self-existent God who created all and is Lord of all.
    - a. This is the opening line of the Shema cited daily by every Jew and was included in the scripture rolls in the phylacteries/small boxes on the Jews’ forehead and arms.
    - b. It requires that there is to be no other Lord, no other Jehovah, in one’s life—no one nor thing to whom one submits to over God.
  3. Second, it meant complete inner and outer devotion—loving God with **all** one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength.
    - a. Picture a man and woman whose love is clearly that of heart, soul, mind, and strength.
    - b. Think of how this love is fixated on that one special person and no other, and how it captivates their minds, drawing them to be together, driving them to communicate with one another and learn of one another!
    - c. That love, but even greater, is what God desires in His relationship with His people.
      - i. We as parents must grasp the depth of this love and devotion.
      - ii. Without it, imparting this to your children will likely be a futile effort.
- B. How this love is communicated to our children:

1. To better understand how this is done, consider the basis of Jesus' answer to the scribe above (Deut. 6:4-9 – “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> These words, which I am commanding you today, **shall be on your heart.** <sup>7</sup> You shall **teach them diligently** to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign **on your hand** and they shall be as frontals **on your forehead.** <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”).
2. Loving God must be communicated...
  - a. *By example*
    - i. Love and devotion to God must first reside *in the parents' hearts, souls* (6:6, 8).
    - ii. Here God demands that all we do and see in this world be filtered through God's word—signs on our hands, frontlets ever before our eyes, words on doorposts and gates of your house to see as we go in or out!
    - iii. *Pulpit Helps* magazine did a survey that produced some interesting results.
      - i) It was found that kids that remain faithful and active do not do so because of: (1) the size of the congregation (2) the number of classes and special programs sponsored by the church (3) the effectiveness of the youth minister.
      - ii) Instead, when both parents were *faithful and active*, 93% of their children were faithful and active.
    - iv. Your children need to see in you a profound love for God for...
      - i) His **gift** of saving you by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God.”).
      - ii) His faithfulness (Heb. 13:5-6 – “*Let your conduct be* without covetousness; *be content with such things as you have.* For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we may boldly say: “The LORD *is* my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”).
      - iii) The hope of eternal life He gives (1 Pet. 1:3-5 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”).
    - v. Do they see in you the example of love for God because of these things?
  - b. With *diligence* (Deut. 6:7 – “you shall **teach them diligently**”)
    - i. God expects parents to work hard to impress upon their children the proper understanding of God's word and how to love and serve Him properly.
    - ii. This is a full-time job without vacations!
    - iii. Too often, however, children are diligently taught by their parents that secular studies, etc., are more important than God, with far less emphasis on studying God's word and being prepared for Bible class than for math class, etc.
  - c. *Spending time together with God* through reading His word and meditating upon it for understanding and direction (Deut. 6:7).
    - i. God wants parents to **talk** with their children about God “when you **sit** in your house and when you **walk** by the way and when you **lie down** and when you **rise up.**”
    - ii. Family devotion time where God's word is read as the day begins is a difficult but a very important part of a godly family's day, as is reading the word at night.
    - iii. Your children need to see in you the truth of David's words (Psa. 119:103-105 – “How sweet are Your words to my taste, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth! <sup>104</sup> Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. <sup>105</sup> Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”).

- iv. Our children need to see that God’s word affects our heart (sweet), our mind (understanding, hate all that is false), and our life (lighting our path)!
- v. When they see your excitement and appreciation for God’s word and the practical guidance and the strength it gives your life, it will influence them toward the same.
- d. *Communicating* together with God.
  - i. We must show our children that prayer is vital to spiritual life and wellbeing (Phil. 4:6-7 – “Be anxious for nothing, but in **everything** by **prayer** and **supplication** with **thanksgiving** let your **requests** be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”).
  - ii. Our children need to see in us that prayer allows them to communicate with God and produces powerful results!
    - i) 1 Jn. 5:14-15 – “This is the **confidence** which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, **He hears us**. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”
    - ii) Jas. 5:16 – “...The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”
  - iii. When they see that your concerns and needs are regularly poured out to God in prayer—that prayer make your life better—it will strongly influence them to make it part of their life!

## II. Spirituality and the unbending rule

- A. In parenting your child toward true spirituality there is a rule that cannot be bent or broken.
  - 1. Spoken by Jesus:
    - a. Mk. 12:29 – “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”
    - b. Matt. 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”
  - 2. These two passages lay down a simple, non-negotiable rule of law for true spirituality:
    - a. We have one Lord that is served with *undivided allegiance*!
    - b. It is done *with no exceptions*. This rule must stand despite the whining, tears, fears, or pleading of our children or those around them, and despite the frustration, disgust, or even hatred of others!
- B. You must be vigilant to impress this rule inwardly and outwardly.
  - 1. They must see that this is the *only acceptable* response *from their heart and actions*.
  - 2. This devotion must be held to without excuse or embarrassment (Mk. 8:38 – “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”).
  - 3. You must not succumb to the pressure of the world, and there is a lot of it, to fill your children’s lives with secular, worldly things, that will take them away from God!
    - a. We are told that to maintain our economic standard we must apply relentless pressure for scholastic success, resulting in long school days and time-consuming homework.
    - b. Also, the world’s philosophy is that good parenting necessitates filling a child’s life with all sorts of extra-curricular activities.
      - i. These include sports, band, scholastic activities, often with both long and year-round practices, as well as the games, competitions, and not to mention jobs, etc.
        - i) Everything is competing for their *time* and *their hearts*!
        - ii) I am not saying that these activities, *if kept in perspective*, are wrong. But, keeping them *in perspective* is the *issue*!
        - iii) For, the world is not going to keep these in perspective! Only you can do that!
      - ii. And be aware that these are not really the family activities they are presented to be, seeing that 90%+ of these activities happen when your child is away from the family!

4. You must decide *now* to be *unwavering in your commitment to this rule!*
  - a. There *will* be regular conflicts with worship, bible study, family time, and you can add to that the pressure from coaches, leaders, and team mates to compromise.
  - b. This may be the **MOST IMPORTANT POINT** you will ever learn in raising godly children, seeing it is how we show our love and honor to God—that He is the only Lord!
  - c. If you fill your child’s life with secular things, and especially if you allow these things to win when they conflict with God’s will, don’t be surprised when your child will not take a stand for God or follows a secular path when he/she is on their own!
  - d. Illus: A Christian who was the president of a large state university once stated that “students do not lose their faith because evolution or humanism are taught in the classroom, but rather because they become so **absorbed in secular activities**, that they **do not take time for spiritual activities** like worship, individual bible study, prayer, etc., and they **make their friends of the worldly**. They do not die spiritually from poison; they die from malnutrition!” (Bill Hall, *Christianity Magazine*).
    - i. Do not start them on that path!
    - ii. For, there is an *inward* battle concerning this rule that must be fought and won.
      - i) Berry Kertcheville spoke of this here a few years ago when he detailed how someone he knew got his children involved in sports and travelling to tournaments, etc.
      - ii) This man always took his children to worship wherever they travelled.
      - iii) But this man lost his children to godlessness because, he admitted, they saw in him a *passion for the game, not the Lord*. Worship was just a “necessary distraction.”
      - iv) Your kids need to see that your passion is God, not worldly things. Do they?
5. So, my friends, if you want to win this battle for your child’s soul, you must *fight with spiritual weapons* (2 Cor. 10:3-5 – “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup>For the weapons of our warfare **are not carnal** but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, <sup>5</sup>casting down arguments and **every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God**, bringing **every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ**”).
  - a. Every aspect of your child’s life, beginning with their mind, their thoughts, must be trained to be subject to Christ’s will (Col. 3:17)!
  - b. I know that doing all of this is hard. And I know that the world is brutal. So, winning a war like this is never easy or without sacrifice.
6. Seek God’s help (Heb. 2:16-18 – “For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”).

#### CONCLUSION:

1. I wish I could give you a magic pill or formula that would, without a tremendous amount of effort, cause all to be well and spirituality to be king in your household, but it doesn’t work that way.
2. Raising godly children comes down to loving God with all your heart and conveying that love to your children through uncompromising devotion to Him.
3. Will you choose to meet the challenge, to train your children to be godly, spiritually minded children in this ungodly, secular world? It is up to you!
4. It begins with your commitment to Christ! If you are not a Christian, will you come to Jesus in F-R-C-B?