

# Raising Moral Children

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. Celeste Sibley, a one-time columnist for the Atlanta Constitution, took her three children to a diner for breakfast one morning.
  - 1. It was crowded and they had to take separate seats at the counter.
  - 2. Eight-year-old John was seated at the far end of the counter and when his food was served he called down to his mother in a loud voice, “Mother, don’t people say grace in this place?”
  - 3. A hush came over the entire diner and before Mrs. Sibley could figure out what to say, the counterman said, “Yes we do. You say it.” All the people at the counter bowed their heads. John bowed his head and in a clear voice thanked God for his food.
- B. Why did John think to ask about saying grace in a crowded restaurant? Because he had been raised to think in those terms.
- C. Those of us who are parents have a great and daunting challenge in the modern world.
  - 1. God, as we have mentioned, has given us parents a solemn obligation to raise our children in his standards: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).
  - 2. In the modern world, attitudes concerning morality are frighteningly out of sync with Scripture.
    - a. Almost four out of ten children are born out-of-wedlock.
    - b. Nearly a fourth of unmarried women ages 25 to 39 are cohabitating with a man, and another fourth have done so in the past. Do you realize that means HALF of young women have live with a man?
    - c. More than 50 percent of teenagers now accept out-of-wedlock births as an acceptable lifestyle and over half of teenagers believe it is acceptable for people to live together before they get married.
  - 3. Our children are being surrounded by this “new morality” and we absolutely need to teach our children!
- D. We can also find ourselves in danger of teaching the wrong values. Scripture contains many examples of where wrong values were taught:
  - 1. Abraham apparently taught his son Isaac that lying is acceptable:
    - a. You recall that when Abraham went to Egypt during a famine, he lied about Sarah’s identity, saying that she was his sister and not his wife (Gn 12:10-20)—Interestingly, this narrative of Abraham’s deceit comes immediately after the narrative where God calls Abraham and promises to bless all the earth through him.
    - b. When there was another famine and Isaac went to Gerar, he lied to Abimelech about Rebekah, saying that she was his sister and not his wife (Gn 26:1-16).
    - c. What is so interesting is that Abraham’s deceit occurred before Isaac was even born.
      - 1) Is it possible that Abraham had a truth problem he passed on to his son?
      - 2) We know that Abraham lied about Sarah’s identity at least twice, for Abraham, like his son, also lied to Abimelech about Sarah’s identity (Gn 20).
  - 2. One of the strangest texts in all of Scripture to me is the case of Samuel.
    - a. You recall that Samuel was not raised by his parents, but he was raised by Eli.
    - b. Eli’s sons were terrible men, and God punished them, and he punished Eli for refusing to restrain them (1 Sm 3:12-13).
    - c. Yet, when Samuel grew old, his sons acted in much the same way as Eli’s sons had acted (1 Sm 8:1-3). Could the reason not very well be that Samuel had learned improper childrearing techniques in Eli’s home?

- E. What type of values do we need to instill in our children?
  - 1. As I mentioned last Sunday night, Paul Faulkner, a well-known psychologist among us interviewed 30 successful families to uncover their child-rearing techniques.
  - 2. Tonight, we're going to think in terms of giving our children values.
    - a. What is a proper value system for our children?
    - b. A proper value system is: BIBLICAL, IT BLESSES PEOPLE, IT DEALS HONESTLY WITH SIN, IT GIVES MEANING AND PURPOSE TO LIFE, & IT ANSWERS THE BIG QUESTIONS.

## **A BIBLICAL VALUE SYSTEM**

- A. Scripture does not encourage us simply to teach our children, but the Word of God teaches us to instill biblical values in our children.
  - 1. Notice carefully the words the Israelites heard in the wilderness: "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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" (Deut 6:6-7). The Israelites weren't to teach simply anything to their children, but they were to teach the words God had commanded them.
  - 2. Notice specifically the obligations placed upon fathers: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).
  - 3. Paul writes to Timothy: "From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 3:15).
- B. There is much talk today in schools and communities about "character education."
  - 1. There is absolutely nothing wrong with "character education." In fact, it has many good qualities: learning not to bully, learning to be responsible citizens, and the like.
  - 2. The problem I have with much character education is that it totally removes God from the equation.
    - a. For example, three psychologists with the Character Education Partnership wrote that children need to learn to be respectful to "promote the development and welfare of the individual person [and] serve the common good."
    - b. Do you realize the importance of that statement?
      - 1) In other words, values are to help people become all they can be and not infringe on others.
      - 2) God has been totally removed from the picture; in fact, man has taken the place of God, for it's "what can we do to help each other, what can we do to help each other feel good about ourselves."
      - 3) Man, not God, becomes the chief determiner of what is right and wrong.
- C. Whatever we read in modern pop psychology, we must remember that Scripture is the standard of our values. It is those values we need to instill in our children. Why should we teach our children Scripture?
  - 1. Scripture is the basis of life: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn 5:29).
  - 2. Scripture empowers moral decisions: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:9-11).
  - 3. Scripture will serve as the basis of the final judgment: "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day" (Jn 12:48).

## **A PROPER VALUE SYSTEM BLESSES PEOPLE**

- A. In other words, a proper value system places others above our own selves and seeks the good of the other person.
- B. The reason for teaching our children to bless others isn't because it helps other folks feel good but because Scripture teaches us to bless others.
  - 1. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone" (Gal 6:10).
  - 2. "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone" (1 Thess 5:15).
- C. How do we teach our children to bless others?
  - 1. We teach them there is no difference in skin color.
    - a. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth! So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:26-27).
    - b. Tomorrow is Martin Luther King, Jr. day in our nation, and it's a wonderful opportunity for us to teach our children the injustice which took place because people differed in skin color.
      - 1) Even within the church of our Lord, great injustices have been done to African Americans. It is still the fact that the ten o'clock hour on Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America.
      - 2) A well-known preacher in our brotherhood—a name familiar to about all of you—was fired in 1968.
        - a) The Sunday after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., he stood in a Mississippi pulpit and encouraged the congregation to reach out to the African American in their community. The elders called him that afternoon and told him never to come back.
        - b) Such things ought not be in the church of our Lord! We must teach our children to judge on the content of character, not the color of skin.
  - 2. We teach our children to serve.
    - a. We have talked repeatedly in the last couple weeks of weeks about service—texts we've read and texts you know—let's just not forget that our children need to serve, too!
    - b. Will we teach our children to serve their classmates, their siblings, and others who need help?

## **DEALS HONESTLY WITH SIN**

- A. We have a real problem in our culture in the way we think and deal with sin.
  - 1. We no longer call sin what it is, but we've come up with clever names to keep from dealing honestly with sin.
  - 2. Thus, adultery becomes "an affair," lying becomes "not being straight," greed becomes "pursuing the American dream," and sin in general becomes "bad choices."
- B. Until we teach our children that sin is sin, we cannot adequately teach good values.
  - 1. In Scripture, those who were able to come to repentance were able to call sin "sin."
    - a. When Nathan confronted David about his adultery with Bathsheba, David responded, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sm 12:13).
    - b. When the prodigal son returned to his father, he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Lk 15:21).
  - 2. Why do we need to teach our children to deal honestly with sin?
    - a. Only when we confess our sins, can we find mercy from God: "Whoever conceals his

transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov 28:13).

- b. Claiming to be without sin places us in a quite precarious situation spiritually:
    - 1) “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8).
    - 2) “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:10).
  - c. Only when we teach our children the reality of sin, can they seek forgiveness of sin:
    - 1) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).
    - 2) “He is the propitiation [that which takes away] the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2).
- C. Ted Koppel succinctly made this observation several years ago when he spoke at a graduation ceremony: “Moses didn’t give us ten suggestions .... In place of truth we have substituted facts. In the place of moral absolutes we have substituted moral ambiguities. We now communicate with everyone and say absolutely nothing. We have reconstructed the Tower of Babel—the TV antenna.”
- 1. If we teach our children to deal honestly with sin, we will teach them truth, not facts and moral absolutes, not moral ambiguities.
  - 2. Do we have the courage to teach our children the difference between righteousness and sin, morality and immorality in the present world?

## **GIVES MEANING AND PURPOSE TO LIFE**

- A. The society in which we presently live searches for the meaning and purpose of life.
  - 1. Many philosophers and psychologists end up telling us now that the meaning and purpose of life are ideas such as personal happiness, self-realization, and the good of all people.
  - 2. Others aren’t so certain and they wonder how we can say life has any purpose since we came from some pre-organic goo.
  - 3. There are other people who want to know what the purpose of their individual life is—they aren’t so interested in the philosophical question as a whole as they are in knowing why they themselves have been placed on this earth.
- B. A solid morality we can pass to our children provides such a meaning and purpose.
  - 1. “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl 12:13).
  - 2. There’s my purpose in life. It’s not:
    - a. Happiness. The Scriptures don’t deny that we should be joyful, but happiness, quite honestly, has much more to do with external circumstances. God’s much more concerned that I do his will than to go around happy simply because things are going my way.
    - b. Self-realization. The purpose of life isn’t to find out who I am, for we know who we are. We are here to serve God.
    - c. Good of all people. Of course, the Scriptures teach that we should be servants and that we ought to do good to others. The difference is my motivation. I’m not serving just be serving and I’m not doing good just to be doing good. I’m serving and doing good, for that’s what God expects and because others bear God’s image.
    - d. Earning money. My purpose isn’t to enlarge my bank account. My purpose is to serve God with everything I have.
  - 3. Are we honoring God and keeping his commandments? Are we teaching our children to do likewise?

## **ANSWERS THE BIG QUESTIONS**

- A. Socrates said that the basic purpose of philosophy is to teach us how to die.
- B. No other moral system provides anything close as to how we ought to die.
  - 1. If my purpose in life is to seek happiness, what happens when I must breathe my last?
  - 2. If my purpose has been to find out who I am, what good is that going to do with the undertaker buries my body?
  - 3. If I've sought the good of the community simply because that's my purpose in life, I might have a crowded funeral, but I'm still dead.
  - 4. If I've sought money and money and money, what am I going to do when money is no longer the answer?
- C. According to our moral system, death has been overcome by Christ and those who live in him will be raised with him.
  - 1. Jesus says, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (Jn 5:28-29).
  - 2. 1 Cor 15:20—26. Notice that in this text, Paul specifically mentions those belonging to Christ as those who have share in Christ's resurrection (v. 23).
  - 3. In our moral system, as much as death stings, we know that death is not the end of the story. Jesus has come and conquered death. Those who align themselves with Christ, shall likewise overcome death through him. Are you in a position to share with Christ in his resurrection?