

## **Lecture Notes: Chapters 3 & 4**

### **Review**

“The only safe guide (to parenting) is the Bible. It is the revelation of a God who has infinite knowledge and can therefore give you absolute truth. God has given you a revelation that is robust and complete. It presents an accurate and comprehensive picture of children, parents, family life, values, training, nurture, discipline - all you need to be equipped for the task of parenting” (Shepherding XV, XVII).

“The central focus of parenting is the gospel. You need to direct not simply the behavior of your children, but the attitudes of their hearts. You need to show them not just the ‘what’ of their sin and failure, but the ‘why’” (Shepherding XVIII).

“The purpose for your authority in the lives of your children is not to hold them under your power, but to empower them to be self-controlled people living freely under the authority of God”.

### **1. Your Child's Development: Godward Orientation**

Tedd Tripp's sailing illustration: “As a college student, I received my first exposure to sailing. I recall my amazement to learn that the direction of the craft is not determined by the direction of the breeze, but by the trim of the sail. Godward orientation is like the set of the sail in a child's life. Whatever the shaping influences of life, it is the child's Godward orientation that determines his response to those shaping influences” (Pg. 18).

Proverbs 9:7-10 contrasts the mocker's and wise man's responses to rebuke and instruction: “Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Verse 10 helps us see what ultimately determines whether a child responds as a mocker or a wise man. It is the fear of the Lord that makes one wise, and it is that wisdom that determines how he responds to the correction.

*(Refer to Figure 3 Godward Orientation on page 19)*

This diagram represents the child as a covenantal being. That expression is to remind us that all human beings have a Godward orientation. Everyone is essentially religious. Children are worshipers. Either they worship Jehovah or idols. They are never neutral. Your children filter the experiences of life through a religious grid.

Romans 1:18-19 says: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.” All people have God's clear revelation of truth, but wicked people suppress that truth. They refuse to acknowledge and submit to the things God has

made plain. Paul goes on to say that although they know God, they do not glorify Him but become futile in their thinking and eventually worship idols.

In the language of Romans 1, your children either respond to God by faith or they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. If they respond to God by faith, they find fulfillment in knowing and serving God. If they suppress the truth in unrighteousness, they ultimately worship and serve the creation rather than the Creator. This is the sense in which the term “Godward orientation” is used and represents the diagram shown on page 19.

### Choosing Between Two Ways

While the young child may not be conscious of his religious commitment, he is never neutral. Made in the image of God, he is designed with a worship orientation. Even as a young child, he is either worshipping and serving God or idols.

One of the truths behind the reason for spanking children is that “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). The point of the proverb is that something is wrong in the heart of the child that requires correction. The remedy is not solely changing the structure of the home; it is addressing the heart.

### The Heart is Not Neutral

The idols your child is worshipping are not small wooden or stone statuary; they are subtle idols of the heart such as: fear of man, evil desires, lusts, and pride. The idols also include conformity to the world, embracing earthly mindsets, and “setting affections on things below”.

As your children interact with their childhood experience, they interact based on their Godward orientation. Either they respond to life as children of faith who know, love, and serve Jehovah, or they respond as children of foolishness. The point is they do respond and are not neutral. They are simply not the sum total of what you put into them; they interact with life either out of a true covenant of faith or out of an idolatrous covenant of unbelief.

### Whom Will the Child Worship?

Parenting is not just providing good input or creating a constructive home atmosphere and positive interaction between a child and his parent. There is another dimension. The child is interacting with the living God or he is seeking to make sense of life without a relationship with God. The question is not “will he worship?” It is always “*whom* will he worship?”

### Implications for Childrearing

The task you undertake in child rearing is always concerned with both shaping influences (diagram 2 on page 11) and Godward orientation (diagram 3 on page 19). You do want to provide the best possible shaping influences for your children (i.e., a home that provides stability and security; the relationships in your home reflecting the grace of God for failing sinners with discipline meted out to be appropriate and to reflect God’s holy view of sin; a peaceful home, etc.). Those things are important, but they will never be the total story. Your child is not just a product of those shaping influences. He interacts with all these things, but he interacts according to the nature of the covenantal choices he is making.

This means that we may never conclude that our children's problems are simply a lack of maturity. In other words, selfishness is not outgrown. Rebellion against authority is not outgrown but rather is a reflection of the idolatry of your child's heart.

"The main point is that there are two issues that feed into the persons your children become: 1) the shaping influences of life, and 2) their Godward orientation. Therefore, your parenting must address both of these issues. You must be concerned about how you structure the shaping influences of life under your control (some things are not, e.g., death, and so forth). Secondly, you must be actively shepherding the Godward orientation of your children. In all of this you must pray that God will work in and around your efforts and the responses of your children to make them people who know and honor God" (Pg. 25).

## **2. You're in Charge**

Our culture does not like authority. It is not just that we don't like to be under authority, we don't like being authorities. We need a biblical understanding of authority.

Questions abound: What is the nature of the parent's authority over a child? Is it absolute or relative? Is the authority vested in the parent because of the relative size difference between parents and young children? Are we in charge because we are smarter and more experienced? Do we have the right to tell our children to do anything we want them to do?

If you don't answer questions such as these, you will be tentative and insecure in discharging your duty to God and to your children. Your children will never know what to expect from you because the ground rules will be constantly changing. They will never learn the absolutes and principles of God's Word that alone teach wisdom.

The culture we live in can think of authority as derived either from overwhelming force or consent. Therefore, the only way we can respond is either with rebellion or servility. Our culture has no notion of intelligent, thinking persons willingly placing themselves under authority. When we allow children to become independent decision-makers, we give them a false idea of liberty and a mistaken notion of freedom. Freedom is not found in autonomy, it is found in obedience (Psalm 119:44-45).

"As a parent, you have authority because God calls you to be an authority in your child's life. You have the authority to act on behalf of God. As a father or mother, you do not exercise rule over your jurisdiction but over God's. You act at His command. You discharge a duty that He has given. You may not try to shape the lives of your children as pleases you but as pleases Him" (Pg. 28).

"Parenting goals are often no more noble than immediate comfort and convenience. When parents require obedience because they feel under pressure, obedience of children is reduced to parental convenience ... If you allow unholy anger to muddy the correction process, you are wrong. You need to ask for forgiveness. Your right to discipline your children is tied to what God has called you to do, not your own agenda" (Pp. 29, 30).

"Correction is not you showing anger for their offenses; it is rather reminding them that their sinful behavior offends God. It is bringing His censure of sin to these subjects of His realm" (Pg. 36).

Unholy anger-anger over the fact that you are not getting what you want from your child will muddy the waters of discipline. Anger that your child is not doing what you want frames discipline as a problem between parent and child, not a problem between the child and God. It is God who is not being obeyed when you are not obeyed and God who is not honored when you are not honored. The issue is not simply an interpersonal contest; it is, rather, your insistence that your child obey God because obeying God is good and right.

### Confidence to Act

When you direct, correct, or discipline, you are not acting out of your own will; you are acting on behalf of God. You don't have to wonder if it is okay for you to be in charge. You certainly do not need your child's permission. God has given you a duty to perform; therefore, the endorsement of your child is not necessary.

### A Mandate to Act

Understanding that you are God's agent as a parent deals not only with the right to act, it also provides the mandate to act. You have no choice. You must engage your children. You are acting in obedience to God. It is your duty.

### Humility in Your Task

Understanding that you function as God's agents can keep you sharply focused and humble as parents. It is sobering to realize that you correct your child by God's command. You stand before him as God's agent to show him his sin. I know of no realization that will sober and humble the parent like this one. Your focus can be sharpened by the realization that discipline is not you working on your agenda, venting your wrath toward your children; it is you coming as God's representative, bringing the reproofs of life to your son or your daughter.

### No Place for Anger

We do not want to discipline our children and manipulate them through displays of raw anger, as they will learn the fear of man, not the fear of God.

James 1:19-20 says: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry; for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."

If you correct and discipline your children because God mandates it, then you need not clutter up the task with your anger. Correction is not displaying your anger at their offenses; it is reminding them that their sinful behavior offends God. It is bringing His censure of sin to these subjects of his realm. He is the King. They must obey.

### Discipline: Corrective, Not Punitive and an Expression of Love

If correction orbits around the parent who has been offended, then the focus will be venting anger or, perhaps, taking vengeance. The function is punitive. If, however, correction orbits around God as the one offended, then the focus is restoration.

Proverbs 3:12: "...the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in." Discipline is not revenge—getting even with the child for what he did. God disciplines us for our good that we might share in His holiness. Discipline may not be pleasant, but though painful, it yields a harvest of righteousness. It is the deepest expression of love. Discipline is positive instruction rather than negative punishment. Discipline still brings with it consequences, but our correction must be tied to the principles and absolutes of the Word of God. The issues of discipline are issues of character development and honoring God. It is God's non-negotiable standard that fuels correction and discipline.

### **Prayer**

- Read Proverbs 9:7-10 and consider your child's response to the direction and correction they receive from you. Would you characterize them as wise or as a mocker?
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you walk in your God-ordained authority with your kids as you help them develop their Godward orientation. Pray for your children by name to walk in the fear of the Lord, receiving your loving, instructive correction and then moving closer to their Heavenly Father.