

Lecture Notes: Chapters 1 & 2

Introduction

“Our culture has lost its way with respect to parenting. We are a rudderless ship without a compass. We lack both a sense of direction and the capacity to direct ourselves...The only safe guide 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, and discipline - all you need to be equipped for the task of parenting” (Shepherding XV, XVII).

Biblical Parenting

“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 parenting task is multifaceted. It involves being authorities who are kind, shepherding your children to understand themselves in God’s world, and keeping the gospel in clear view so your children can internalize the good news and someday live in mutuality with you as people under God” (Shepherding XVII).

“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” (Shepherding XVIII).

1. Getting to the Heart of Behavior

Proverbs 4:23: Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- The heart determines behavior. What you say and do expresses the orientation of your heart.
- Mark 7:21 states “...from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, folly. “ These evils in action and speech come from within—from the heart. What our children say and do is a reflection of what is in their hearts.

Luke 6:45 corroborates this point: The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

These passages are instructive for the task of childrearing. They teach that behavior is not the basic issue. The basic issue is always about what is going on in the heart. The heart is the control center of life.

Parents often get sidetracked with behavior. If your goal in discipline is changed behavior, it is easy to understand why this happens. The thing that alerts you to your child's need is his behavior. Behavior irritates and thus calls attention to itself. Behavior becomes your focus. You think you have corrected when you have changed unacceptable behavior to behavior you sanction and appreciate.

What is the problem with that? The problem is this: Your child's needs are far more profound than his aberrant behavior. His behavior doesn't spring forth uncaused; his behavior (the things he says and does) is a reflection of his heart. If you are to really help him, you must be concerned with the attitudes of his heart that drives his behavior. A change of behavior that does not come from a change of heart is not commendable - it is condemnable (Jesus and the Pharisees: Matthew 15).

- As parents, we must understand, and help your child to understand, how his straying heart has resulted in wrong behavior.
- You must require proper behavior. God's law demands it. You cannot, however, be satisfied to leave the behavior there. You must ask your child questions that will expose the attitude of the heart that resulted in wrong behavior. How did his heart stray to produce this behavior? In what characteristic ways has his inability or refusal to know, trust, and obey God resulted in actions and speech that are wrong?
- In addressing behavior issues in our children, our goal as parents is to unmask our child's sin, helping him to understand how it reflects a heart that has strayed. This leads to the cross of Christ and underscores the need for a savior.

2. Your Child's Development: Shaping Influences

- Shaping influences are those events and circumstances in a child's developmental years that prove to be catalysts for making him the person he is. But the shaping is not automatic. There is clear biblical warrant for acknowledging shaping influences (Deuteronomy 6, Ephesians 6, and Colossians 3).
- The person your child becomes is a product of two things: The first is his life experience. The second is how he interacts with that experience.
- Two mistakes are made in interacting with the shaping influences of life. The first is seeing shaping influences deterministically. It is the error of assuming that the child is a helpless victim of the circumstances in which he was raised. "Christian" determinism makes parents conclude that good shaping influences will automatically produce good

children. The second mistake is denial. It is the mistake of saying the child is unaffected by his early childhood experience.

- (Optional: Refer students to chart on page 11 listing shaping influences both within and outside the control of parents.)
- Your child is not merely acted upon by the circumstances of life. He reacts. He responds according to the Godward orientation of his heart. Children are never passive receivers of shaping. Rather, they are active responders. Your son or daughter responds to the Godward focus of his or her life.
- If your child knows and loves God and has embraced that knowing God can enable him to know peace in any circumstance, then he will respond constructively to your shaping efforts. If your child does not know and love God but tries to satisfy his soul's thirst by drinking of the "cistern that cannot hold water..." (Jeremiah 2:13), your child may rebel against your best efforts. You must do all that God has called you to do, but the outcome is more complex than whether you have done right things in the right way. Your children are responsible for the way they respond to your parenting.
- Our children are never determined solely by the shaping influences of life but rather the heart is the fountain from where life flows. Your child's heart determines how he responds to your parenting.

Prayer

- Assess how you have been doing with connecting your child's behavior issues to their heart? Are you disciplining out of being irritated or are you helping to direct his/her heart?
- Pray for discernment and wisdom in helping your kids see their sinful heart issues and their need for a Savior.