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GODLY CHILD-REARING: PART 1

In Ephesians 6:12 the Apostle Paul tells us: “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against ... the rulers of the darkness of this world (Greek “aion”), against spiritual wickedness in high places (Greek “epouranios”). In this verse the Greek word “aion” means “age” rather than “world”; and the Greek adjective “epouranios” means “heavenly”, i.e. “what pertains to heaven”, rather than “high places”.

So in this verse Paul tells us that **our real battle as Christians is against Satan** and his demons, identified by Paul as “the rulers of the darkness of this present age” and as “spiritual wickedness pertaining to heavenly things”. And Satan and his demons are certainly not “flesh and blood”. Satan is the real and foremost enemy regarding every aspect of our lives.

Now in our battle with Satan it is **our children** that **are the weakest link** in our defenses! Our children are Satan’s easiest victims in his attacks on us. Satan knows that our children offer the least resistance to every aspect of his influence in this present age. Our children are the most vulnerable, and so Satan certainly attempts to influence us, God’s people, through our children. We need to recognize this.

Almost 50 years ago the Church published a booklet that dealt with the subject of child-rearing. In those years child-rearing was also a frequent sermon subject. That booklet was revised once or twice, and then about 30 years ago it fell from favor because the general tone and approach identified it with the 60's. Times had changed. And in the past 30 years the Church hasn’t dealt very much with the specifics of child-rearing.

At the same time in the world around us child-rearing has become almost completely dominated by an attitude of permissiveness. This attitude of permissiveness is fostered by various governments, and it is simultaneously coupled with a real and vehement hostility towards a godly approach to child-rearing, to the point where in a number of countries parents are threatened with legal action by the authorities, if parents dare to apply physical correction to deal with a child’s disobedience. Satan has clearly stacked the deck against those parents who desire to rear their children in accordance with biblical instructions and guidelines. We also need to be aware of this situation.

But the truth has not changed, and God’s instructions to us as parents have not changed. And so we now have a new generation of parents in the Church who have received relatively little guidance from the Church when it comes to child-rearing. To avoid any possibility of problems with the authorities, the Church has, in general terms, simply avoided the subject altogether. This has left most young parents in the Church looking to worldly authorities and “experts” for some guidance in this area. While some or even much of such advice by worldly authorities may well be helpful and have some merit, none of that advice is presented from a godly perspective. The perspective we have for any subject always has a profound impact on our overall approach.

So in this article I would like to approach the subject of child-rearing from a godly perspective, as it is revealed in the Bible. The purpose here is to provide understanding about what is really involved. That understanding may or may not result in any changes in the day-to-day child-rearing practices of parents? But it is important that we grasp what has happened and what is happening, as far as child-rearing is concerned.

THE MOST BASIC CHILD-REARING SCRIPTURE IN THE BIBLE

Quite a number of Scriptures deal with child-rearing. If you were asked to name the most basic Scripture in the whole Bible that deals with this subject, the Scripture that sets the parameters within which every other reference to this subject should be viewed, what verse or verses would you turn to?

Let's look at Ephesians 2.

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (Ephesians 2:2-3)

Ephesians 2:2 is the most basic Scripture on this subject because it **spells out the real problem** that needs to be confronted by parents in their efforts to rear their children in a godly manner. And it also infers the parameters for this subject.

The real problem that all parents are going to have to deal with in rearing their children is that Satan automatically influences little children. Little children simply do not have any inherent restraints to Satan's suggestions and inspirations. Satan is the prince of the power of the airwaves. And because small children have no automatic restraints against Satan's unseen impulses, therefore they are spontaneously destructive and selfish and disrespectful, traits which definitively describe the mind of Satan, traits that Satan seeks to inspire in all human beings.

Have you ever observed small children at the beach building sand castles? What's the most exciting part for the little boys? Is it building their sand castles? Do they show real excitement when they are building? Or do they really get excited when they act on a spontaneous impulse to smash everything they or some other children have been building? Take note of the glee with which they destroy whatever has been built. And when you as a parent then try to teach that child to not be so destructive, you should understand that you are not wrestling with flesh and blood!

Have you ever observed a small child sitting at a table and being instructed to hold a cup or a spoon? And before too long that child dropped the cup or the spoon. Then the child looks down at the dropped object and squeals with delight. The parent dutifully picks up the item and gives it back to the child, with an admonition to not drop it again. A few seconds later the item is dropped or thrown down again, accompanied by more squeals of delight. And the whole process is then repeated. Have you ever seen this?

The parent tries to reason with the child, and the child enjoys dropping things to the floor. Most parents in this situation try to find a justification for the child's actions (as in "he just loves the sound it makes when it hits the floor", etc.), without remotely realizing that it is not flesh and blood that they are wrestling with.

Have you ever been in a supermarket where a small boy saw something that he wanted to have, and when the mother said "no" the little boy started hollering at the top of his lungs? The mother then tried to reason with the little boy and to enforce her decision on him, but he just yelled louder and louder. Clearly he was not going to give up. So eventually the mother either gave in and allowed the child to have whatever it was that he wanted, or she just wheeled her cart to another aisle or perhaps she even stormed out of the supermarket. This mother certainly did not realize that she also was not wrestling against flesh and blood.

Have you ever observed small children playing together on the carpet? Each child has one or more toys to play with. Suddenly, on impulse (note!) one child simply takes away another child's toy. And then the child who has been deprived of his toy starts to wail. One parent dutifully tells little Billy "now you give

that toy back to Jimmy; it is Jimmy's turn to play with that toy". Billy reluctantly or under duress gives the toy back to Jimmy, only to shortly afterwards take something else that Jimmy is already playing with. And the wailing starts all over again. The parent once again tries to explain to Billy that what he has done is not right. But at no stage does this parent realize that he or she is not wrestling against flesh and blood.

> **In every one of the above cases the parents were really wrestling against "the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience".**

At its most basic level godly child-rearing is a **battle** between the parents on the one hand and Satan on the other hand. And the object of the battle is to determine exactly **who will control the mind of that child**: the parents or Satan? These are the only two parties involved in that battle, the parents and Satan. The only other thing we need to understand in this context is that Satan makes full use of numerous **surrogates**, which may at times confuse the parents as to the identity of the real adversary in the exercise of godly child-rearing. But parents need to understand that the real adversary is always Satan. And in almost all families Satan is winning this battle hands-down.

All of God's people need to recognize that Satan has always excelled in the area of "**spontaneous destructiveness**". That is why Satan is known in Hebrew as "Abaddon" and in Greek as "Apollyon" (see Revelation 9:11). Whenever we witness any such spontaneous destructiveness, we should understand that the destructive person is fully committed to implementing in an unrestrained way impulses that originated with Satan. The person is doing EXACTLY what Satan has inspired them to do, without that person, be it adult or child, being aware of the origin of the destructive impulses.

[COMMENT: The Greek verb "apollumi" means both, "to destroy" and also "to be lost". The noun "apollyon" thus means "the destroyer" and also at the same time "the one who will become lost". The first meaning of this name (destroyer) applies to Satan's past and present conduct. The second meaning of this name (the one who will become lost) applies to Satan's future, also pictured by the Azazel goat on the Day of Atonement. Most biblical Greek dictionaries will only give you the meaning of "destroyer" for the name "apollyon". But you should also be aware of this second meaning. The same two meanings also apply to the Hebrew name "abaddon".]

So when our young children respond with "spontaneous destructiveness" to certain situations, then we need to understand that we are right then and there being attacked by Satan! Do we give in to Satan or will we resist the devil?

THE TWO MAIN GOALS FOR GODLY CHILD-REARING

Because children cannot see Satan or even perceive his influences, therefore by nature they have no restraints to any of Satan's evil impulses of rebellion, disobedience, selfishness and disrespect for authority in general.

And so the **first** and greatest goal in godly child-rearing is:

> **TO HELP OUR CHILDREN BUILD RESTRAINTS AGAINST THE UNSEEN IMPULSES THAT REACH THEIR MINDS!**

And the **second** great goal in godly child-rearing is like unto it, namely:

TO TEACH OUR CHILDREN WHAT IS RIGHT AND GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR AND CONDUCT!

On these two goals hang all the other aspects of godly child-rearing. Every other point in child-rearing deals with how to achieve these two goals. And that's what we should get from examining Ephesians 2:2. But we must also never forget that the first goal really must come first, because without that first goal as a foundation it will be extremely difficult to achieve the second goal. The less restraints we develop to unseen impulses (e.g. a quick temper), the more vulnerable we will always be to Satan's attacks.

Solomon wrote the following in the Book of Proverbs:

> He that hath **no rule over his own spirit** is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

Solomon recognized the **total vulnerability** of the person who has no restraint against the unseen impulses that reach his mind. Unseen impulses to do wrong invariably come from Satan, the one who controls the airwaves, remember? And such **restraint** to acting on impulse needs to be taught, developed and firmly entrenched in childhood.

Let's now look at some of the attributes of childhood.

12 ATTRIBUTES OF CHILDHOOD

The following points are an appraisal of childhood. For each point there is a scriptural reference. While most of them are negative tendencies, there certainly also are some positive tendencies. Let's look at these 12 attributes, some of which could certainly be combined or consolidated if someone wanted to do that, though it would not really change anything in the overall picture.

1. FOOLISHNESS

> **Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child**; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

That is just the way it is, and Solomon certainly recognized this fact.

2. LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

> For my people is foolish, they have not known me; **they are sottish children**, and **they have none understanding**: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. (Jeremiah 4:22)

While Jeremiah was here speaking about the adult population, it is certainly also correct that children lack understanding.

3. VERY GULLIBLE

> **The simple believeth every word**: but the prudent man looketh well to his going. (Proverbs 14:15)

This is especially true for children, that they are extremely gullible.

4. EASILY INFLUENCED AND DECEIVED

> That we henceforth be no more **children**, tossed to and fro, and **carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (EphESIANS 4:14)

This is a continuation of the previous point, but going a step further. Not only are they gullible, but children are also easily led into wrong conduct.

5. VERY FICKLE

> That we henceforth be no more **children**, **tossed to and fro**, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (Ephesians 4:14)

One day someone is a child's best friend, the next day they hate that person, and a day later that person is again their best friend. Fickleness is typical of childhood.

6. IGNORANCE

> For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, **ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God**; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. (Hebrews 5:12)

Until they receive some teaching, children are ignorant of what is right and what is wrong before God.

7. A NEED FOR BOTH, TUTORS AND RULERS

> Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a **child**, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But **is under tutors and governors** until the time appointed of the father. (Galatians 4:1-2)

Children have a need for teachers, and they also have a need for **somebody else to make the right decisions for them** (i.e. while they are still children). This is extremely important.

8. HAVE PETTY COMPLAINTS

> But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like **unto children** sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, **We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced**; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. (Matthew 11:16-17)

Here Jesus Christ chose an example that illustrates the petty reasons frequently underlying the actions of children.

9. A LOVE FOR PLAYING

> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of **boys and girls playing** in the streets thereof. (Zechariah 8:4-5)

The love for playing is a positive attribute which, if wisely directed, can be put to good use in the overall plan for rearing the children. Playing is certainly mentioned in a positive way in this millennial Scripture in Zechariah. It is good for children to have enjoyable activities.

10. IMMATURITY

> **When I was a child**, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, **I thought as a child**: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11)

It is self-evident that children are going to be immature. But we need to take this immaturity into account in our child-rearing practices.

11. A NEED TO GROW

> As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, **that ye may grow thereby**: (1 Peter 2:2)

All children need to grow, not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. And as babies we all automatically desired “what is good for us”. It is this positive desire for something good that the Apostle Peter is appealing to in this verse.

12. TEACHABLE AND RESPONSIVE

> And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer **little children** to come unto me, and forbid them not: **for of such is the kingdom of God**. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. (Luke 18:15-17)

It is the attribute of being very teachable and readily responsive to instructions that Jesus Christ was here referring to. This is obviously the opposite of some of the attributes we have already considered.

In our child-rearing we really need to be aware of all of these 12 attributes. They range from **THE TENDENCY** to be easily influenced, deceived and led astray, right up to **THE POTENTIAL** to readily take in and respond positively to the right teaching and instructions. So another way to define godly child-rearing is to say that it consists of **COUNTERING the negative tendencies**, and **NURTURING the positive potentials**. It is again a matter of helping our children to build restraints to negative forces and impulses, and to teach them what is right and good.

In this process it is not enough for parents to teach the right knowledge and the right actions. Correct teaching must also teach **THE RIGHT VALUE SYSTEM**, one based on the laws of God. And that process of teaching the right value system should never be delegated to someone else: not to babysitters or to the schools or to government agencies or to the churches. As far as teaching the right values is concerned, every parent needs to follow the admonition “THE BUCK STOPS HERE”! It is the

responsibility of the parents to guide the development of a conscience in their children. That is not to say that when parents fail to teach correct values, that those values cannot then be taught to the children by someone else. They certainly can also be taught by other people. But it is God's intention that the correct values should be taught primarily by the parents. And as parents we need to recognize this responsibility.

Now let's examine a Scripture that puts these two key areas of child-rearing together.

EPHESIANS 6:4 EXAMINED

> And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture (Greek "paideia") and admonition (Greek "nouthesia") of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

In this verse Paul distills the whole essence of child-rearing, a responsibility Paul clearly attributes to the father, into the two basic concepts represented by the words "nurture" and "admonition". The Greek noun "paideia" (i.e. "**nurture**") really means: discipline, correction, chastening. This word has to do with administering **physical correction** where appropriate. Paul's point here is that if such physical correction is administered inappropriately or unfairly, then it will "provoke the children to wrath".

The Greek noun "nouthesia" (i.e. "**admonition**") is derived from the Greek word "nous", which means "the mind". So this Greek word "nouthesia" literally means: to put in the mind. This word has to do with **teaching right values and knowledge to the mind**.

By stating that children should be reared "in the nurture and admonition **of the Lord**", Paul made clear that the entire child-rearing experience must be based on teaching God's value system.

An unpolished but correct amplified translation of Ephesians 6:4 would be:

> And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up with **physical correction to help them build restraints and to counter the negative tendencies**, and with **teaching their minds** the ways of God in order **to promote and to develop all their positive potentials**.

All child-rearing always comes back to these two points. Now we come to the important aspect of perspective.

THE CORRECT PERSPECTIVE IN GODLY CHILD-REARING

So far we have looked at some common attributes of childhood, and we have also established the two great overriding goals for child-rearing. We recognize that striving for achievement of these two great goals must take all the common attributes of childhood into account. But we also need to establish the correct perspective from which we must approach this subject, because Satan has provided another perspective, one which has found pretty well universal acceptance in the western world. Practicing child-rearing from the wrong perspective is like trying to play tennis with a badminton racquet; it just becomes extremely difficult to achieve the desired results because "the racquet" is too weak for the job it is supposed to perform. Remember this analogy.

So let's consider two major perspectives.

1) The godly perspective is one where **the children seek to please the parents**. In this perspective the parents certainly love their children, but they don't really seek the favor of the children. Rather, the

parents make decisions that are best for the children, even when the children are likely to respond with displeasure to some of those decisions. It is the responsibility of the children to seek the favor of their parents by the way the children behave and conduct themselves, and by the way they respond to their parents. With this perspective the children need to learn that doing what is right is more important than doing what will gain us favor with other people in the short term. Here the parents practice their child-rearing from a **position of strength**.

2) Satan's perspective is one where **the parents seek to please their children**. In this perspective the parents have a misguided perception of love, and they try to buy the love and affection of their children by fulfilling all of the children's wishes and demands. Frequently this approach also hides how utterly clueless the parents really are regarding proper child-rearing. With this perspective what is best for the children is frequently neglected in favor of doing whatever will gain the approval of the children. This approach encourages and nurtures an attitude of selfishness in the children, and the children can readily manipulate their parents to get whatever they may want. Here the parents practice their child-rearing from **a position of weakness**.

This latter approach is oblivious to the principle of Lamentations 3:27, that "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth". This approach avoids ever exposing the children to "a yoke", ensuring that they miss out on some very valuable lessons.

To confirm the godly perspective we should look at how God rears His children. So let's look at what Solomon wrote:

> My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For **whom the LORD loveth he correcteth**; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Proverbs 3:11-12)

Paul not only quoted these verses in his letter to the Hebrews, Paul actually strengthened this quotation with some additional statements.

> And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom **the Lord** loveth he chasteneth, and **scourgeth every son whom he receiveth**. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for **what son is he whom the father chasteneth not**? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (Hebrews 12:5-8)

These verses describe godly child-rearing. And clearly God's child-rearing practices are not motivated by a desire to gain the favor of His children. Chastising and scourging is not the way to ever gain favor with anyone in the short term. Clearly God does not seek our approval or our favor in the way He rears us; God is simply going to do what HE knows is best for achieving the desired results. If we don't like God's methods of preparing us to become His sons and daughters, then that is too bad for us. In this present age pleasing us will never be a consideration in the way God rears us, although God did try that approach with one particular individual, remember?

Yes, God actually tried the approach of giving **Solomon**, whom God loved (2 Samuel 12:24), everything that Solomon could possibly have wanted (see 1 Kings 3:11-13), together with the admonition that Solomon was to faithfully keep all of God's laws and commandments (verse 14). In effect, God did everything that Solomon could have asked for, in an attempt to please Solomon. Solomon had every reason in the world, without any reservations whatsoever, to be extremely pleased with and grateful for

the way God was treating him. And Solomon's own words in Proverbs 3:11-12 (that God chastens and corrects those He loves) didn't really apply to Solomon himself; at least not until Solomon became involved in idolatry in a very serious way.

So note! With Solomon God actually tried the approach of "**ask what I shall give you**" (1 Kings 3:5) in the hope that the child (i.e. Solomon) would reciprocate and take the approach of "the child seeking to please the parent". That's the same approach which many parents take today.

But it didn't work! Solomon "did evil in the sight of the Eternal" (1 Kings 11:6), and at the end of Solomon's life God was "angry with Solomon" (verse 9). Solomon's later life bears a sad testimony to a man taking selfishness "to the max". See Ecclesiastes 2:10, etc. for a description of Solomon's extreme selfishness.

The lesson for us is simple:

> **If practicing child-rearing from the perspective of the parents trying to please the children didn't work for God, then it isn't going to work for you and for me either!**

Now I want to make clear that in no way are the above statements intended to imply that God somehow did something wrong, or made a mistake in His dealings with Solomon. Before someone draws that wrong conclusion let me explain.

In creating beings with a free will **God was willing to take a considerable risk**. Taking that risk was the only way to achieve this goal of creating other beings that would have truly free minds of their own. So God first created the angels with such free minds. God gave these angels everything they could have wanted, including immortality. We know that the created being to whom God had given the most, Satan, became the leader in a rebellion against God, and one third of all the angels followed Satan in this rebellion. This rebellion occurred in spite of everything God had given to these angels and had done for these angels.

God then created Adam and Eve, and also gave them a free will. At the time of Adam's creation God was still prepared for two different options for working with mankind in order to achieve His purposes. These two options were represented by "the two trees" in the Garden in Eden, where "**the tree of life**" represented **God's intended choice** for dealing with mankind. But we know the story: Adam and Eve chose the other option, which represented Satan's way of thinking.

From then onwards God worked with only those individuals that God specifically called. Early on God gave great physical blessings to a number of individuals who committed their lives to living by God's laws. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all very wealthy men. So was the man Job. In fact, after Job's trials God doubled Job's wealth. For all of these men their great wealth did not detract from their commitment to God. King David was also a very wealthy man, and he remained faithful to God.

As a young man Solomon was extremely humble and very desirous of God's guidance. In response to Solomon's request, God gave Solomon "a wise and understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:12), a reference to Solomon being given access to God's Spirit. So with Solomon's sincere submission to God at that stage of his life, there was the possibility that Solomon might indeed live his whole life in submission to God, like the men I have mentioned above. It was POSSIBLE for Solomon to live in submission to God, but it wasn't guaranteed. In the same way, it had been POSSIBLE for King Saul, who had also been chosen by God, to have remained faithful to God, but in practice King Saul did not remain faithful. When people do not remain faithful to God, then that is always due to the way the people themselves respond to tests and trials, not to something God has done.

With Solomon God was TESTING whether a parent giving his child everything the child could possibly ask for would result in that child always remaining faithful to the parent. This approach failed. The reason it failed is because Satan will always try to exploit great blessings as opportunities to incite selfishness in us human beings. And almost always Satan succeeds in this effort, as he did succeed with Solomon.

Now once Satan is bound, and Jesus Christ is ruling over all human beings, THEN God will once again apply the approach of doing everything possible to please "His children". And so in the millennium, with Satan out of the way, God will pour out UNPRECEDENTED BLESSINGS, exceeding the wildest hopes of mortal human beings. The crops will be so abundant that people won't finish harvesting one crop before the next one is ready for harvesting. And God will speedily answer all the requests of His children. As Isaiah said:

> And it shall come to pass, that **before they call, I will answer**; and **while they are yet speaking, I will hear**. (Isaiah 65:24)

This will truly be the ultimate in the "the parent seeking to please the children" approach. So God WILL try that approach again, BUT NOT UNTIL SATAN HAS BEEN REMOVED! Of all people, Solomon with his wisdom and his established relationship with God had the best possible chances to make this approach work. When it didn't work, because Satan managed to turn Solomon's perspective into one of selfishness, then it showed God that it wouldn't work for other human beings either. And experience has borne that out time and time again, that the parents taking the "ask what I shall give you" approach doesn't really produce faithfulness and commitment, simply because that approach ignores Satan's tempting influence.

So much for God's dealings with Solomon. Let's get back to the two perspectives we are examining.

We need to recognize that it is Satan who wants us as parents to take the perspective of trying to seek to please our children, rather than allowing them to "bear the yoke" in their youth. Satan wants us to encourage selfishness in our children by doing whatever we can to please our children, at the expense of needed discipline and correction. After all, "foolishness" is also bound up in the hearts of OUR children, right? Our children are not the exceptions to Proverbs 22:15.

It is extremely important that parents in God's Church recognize and readily identify these two opposing perspectives in the area of child-rearing. Did I mention that Satan has already ensured that the godly perspective will be vilified by most of society? There is enormous pressure on parents to approach child-rearing from Satan's perspective, from the perspective of the parents seeking to please the children. That is presented as the "enlightened" approach, the "loving" approach, the "deeply concerned" approach. Never mind that it has produced the most selfish society, bar none, in the history of mankind (see 2 Timothy 3:2, the very first statement).

In child-rearing our battle is always with Satan. And Satan never "fights fair". His methods are always devious and perverse and underhanded. He has pitted all of society against any parents who wish to extinguish his influence in the lives of their little children. So don't expect an easy time when you determine to "resist the devil" (James 4:7) in your child-rearing efforts.

MODERN CHILD-REARING ENCOURAGES SELFISHNESS

Let's look at some of the fruits of practicing child-rearing from Satan's perspective, the perspective that has engulfed the whole western world.

Paul predicted that the dominant identifying attitude of our society "in the last days" would be that

people would be “lovers of their own selves”, i.e. they would be **utterly selfish**. Selfishness in society as a whole has escalated during the past 100 years. As society as a whole has become more prosperous, so also has selfishness increased. The **lesson of Solomon’s life** is that prosperity is the most powerful promoter of selfishness; the more material things we have, the more selfish we become.

Yes, the rich may well give large sums to charity, etc., but it is invariably the poorest members of society who are prepared to make the greatest sacrifices. That’s the lesson from the poor widow who gave “two mites” in the account in Mark 12:41-43. Jesus Christ CLEARLY said that this poor widow had “cast more” into the treasury than the vast sums that were given by the rich people. She had made a far greater sacrifice, because she was far less selfishly motivated (i.e. she wasn’t selfish at all). The rich, with very few exceptions, are always more selfish than the poor.

This selfishness also influences how people rear their children. The more wealthy the parents are, the more the children EXPECT TO BE GIVEN! And many children will respond with resentment and with anger if they are not given the things they demand. And the more that parents try to meet those demands, the more selfish the children become. It becomes a vicious circle.

Notice what the prophet Isaiah predicted.

> As for my people, **children are their oppressors**, and **women rule over them**. O my people, **they which lead thee cause thee to err**, and destroy the way of thy paths. (Isaiah 3:12)

Those who have led us into accepting this wrong perspective for child-rearing are causing us to err, and they are destroying the family, the basic building block of human society. Isaiah predicted that it would be the women that would rule in families. In most cases it is the mother that makes all the major decisions in the family, and it is the mother that sets the tone for how the children will be reared. That is a huge problem!

And how do the children oppress their parents? The oppression of the parents results from the needs of the children being given the highest priority (mostly decided by the mother), so that both parents are slaving away just to be able to meet the supposed “needs” of the children. Thus:

1) The parents take on the loan for a bigger house because their two little boys or two little girls can’t be expected to share one room; they certainly each **need** to have their own room, something over 98% of all human beings have never had. The bigger house necessitates more hours at work for one or both parents. But the small kids all having their own PRIVATE rooms is certainly worth it. WHY do small children need privacy?

2) The parents try to get their children into private schools, which are “far better”, right? Okay, we can’t really afford it, but that’s what our kids deserve, and we can always take out some more loans to pay for this.

3) Mom is there just to serve the kids: get them ready in the morning, drive them to school, pick them up after school, take them to band practice, pick them up from band practice, take them for ballet lessons or music lessons or art lessons or swimming lessons or tennis lessons, pick them up from these activities, take them to ... etc., etc. The mom is basically there to meet all of the kids’ wishes and needs. And she needs to have a job outside of the home, so they can pay for some of those “wishes and needs” of the children.

4) The parents are expected to give their children regular amounts of money so they can spend it “at the mall”. And when they turn 16, they expect to have access to the family car, or to be given their own car.

The parents foot the bill for all those things.

In many family decisions the children are the major consideration: we can't live there because there are no schools; we can't live here because there are no friends here for our kids; we can't do this because our kids have other commitments; our kids must have their own cell phones because all their friends have them; our kids must also have designer clothes because that's what their friends wear; our kids must also have all the other things all the other kids have; etc. We can always worry about how to pay for these things later. After all, everybody is in debt, right?

For all practical purposes the parents in these types of situations might as well be seen as the personal slaves of their children. And that is how children are the oppressors of "my people". And in our society the perspective of "it is the children's responsibility to please the parents" is something that is as rare as a dodo bird.

Now am I trying to imply that the things I have mentioned above (small children supposedly needing to have their own rooms, private schooling, extra lessons, extra curricular activities, phones, cars, etc.) are wrong? No, that's not what I mean at all.

What I want to point out is that THE FOCUS on all of these things as being "important to have" is one that promotes selfishness. That's the lesson of Solomon's life. The things God GAVE to Solomon, which enabled Solomon to have every physical luxury available at that time, were not wrong at all. But when these physical things became very important to Solomon, when they became the focus of his endeavors (i.e. in spite of his extreme wealth he still couldn't get enough wealth, so he even taxed his own people to the hilt), then it showed that all these physical blessings had only resulted in making Solomon very, very selfish.

The things I have mentioned here are not wrong in themselves. But when they are seen as "needs" or as "essential", then they become the focus for selfishness. I know that many people will disagree with me here, and that's okay. It's hard to look objectively at the ways of a society, within which we ourselves are so deeply immersed. It would have been just as hard for King David to see the evils of polygamy from within the society within which he lived his whole life. But I suspect that King David would be able to recognize the selfishness inherent in all of our "accepted lifestyle" today as we are able to recognize the selfishness inherent in the custom of polygamy. And I certainly believe that the Apostle Paul (who wrote 2 Timothy) would very readily recognize the utter selfishness in many of the things we today view as "needs" for our children. We can easily convince ourselves that God Himself would surely want us to provide "**only the best**" for our children, but we might be overlooking Hebrews 12:6 and Lamentations 3:27?

Anyway, so much for the two different perspectives from which we as parents can approach the subject of child-rearing. We should be on guard against any aspect of child-rearing that is likely to promote a spirit of selfishness in our children.

Let's now go back to the matter of teaching the minds of our children, referred to by the word "admonition" in Ephesians 6:4.

TEACHING THE MIND

The foundation for teaching true values and the right standards has to be the instructions God gave to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 4.

> Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget **the things which thine**

> **eyes have seen**, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but **teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons**; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, **that they may learn to fear me** all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and **that they may teach their children**. (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)

Parents are to **teach** their children **God's laws**. We must teach **the right values**, shaping the child's conscience to be in harmony with God's laws. Notice what God tells us through the prophet Hosea.

> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast **rejected knowledge**, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing **thou hast forgotten the law of thy God**, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)

The Hebrew word translated twice as "knowledge" here in this verse really refers to: knowledge gained through perception and discernment, including the discernment of what is morally right and wrong.

So here God tells us that His people are destroyed not because knowledge is somehow kept from them, but because **they reject knowledge they don't like**, and their deliberate forgetting of God's laws has clouded **their discernment of right and wrong**.

Notice the next verse.

> **As they were increased, so they sinned against me**: therefore will I change their glory into shame. (Hosea 4:7)

That's exactly the point I made above: the more we prosper materially, the more selfish we become, and the more we sin against God. Note that at the end of the previous verse God said that He would "**forget your children**". Can we recognize that the same point applies to our children: the more we try to give them materially, the more they are likely to become selfish and the more likely they are to sin against God?

THAT is the reason why Satan promotes that specific perspective on child-rearing, so that our children will become more selfish and then lose contact with God.

In teaching the minds of our children we must:

1) Teach God's laws and the right ethical values.

2) Also teach right knowledge, along with skills and abilities.

3) Assign tasks and duties within the family, which must be consistently done.

4) Give very clear directions regarding what is expected of them.

5) Set very clear limits regarding what they are allowed to do; have clear rules.

6) Limit TV viewing, specially for younger children.

7) Enforce instructions and don't allow the children to argue with the parent.

8) Establish clear penalties for disobedience, something that all laws do.

These points are all based on the perspective that it is the children's responsibility to seek to please the parents. The parents will obviously reciprocate, by determining to always do what is best for the children in the long run. But that may at times also involve making decisions which the children do not like, because the children typically look for immediate rewards.

It is one thing for the children to question the decisions their parents are making, because they don't understand those decisions. Parents need to always be willing to discuss and to explain their positions. But once that has been done, if the children then argue with the parents, then the parents need to recognize that this arguing is an expression of the rejection of their authority, and the parents are then no longer wrestling against flesh and blood. So don't allow your children to argue with you!

Parents also need to realize that there is no such thing as "rules" **unless there are also** clearly established penalties for the infringement of those rules. Unless there are clear **penalties** for deliberate disobedience, asking for obedience is meaningless. That is how God rears His children: God up front spells out very clear penalties for the transgression of His instructions. **That is the example for us as parents**.

Parents need to determine some ways of punishing the disobedience of their children. The four main reasons for punishing disobedience are:

1) To help the child build restraints against Satan's unseen impulses.

2) To create a sense of seriousness; disobedience is not something insignificant.

3) To distinguish right from wrong; to teach values and to shape a conscience.

4) To establish justice. Our wrong actions always affect other people and cause harm.

Now let's briefly consider some biblical instructions that apply.

SOME BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS

We have already seen Hebrews 12:5-8 for an insight into how God rears His children. Let's now look at the next three verses for Paul's assessment of child-rearing on our human level.

> Furthermore we have had **fathers of our flesh** which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For **they** verily for a few days **chastened us** after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no **chastening** for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless **afterward** it **yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness** unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:9-11)

First of all, Paul shows that God chastens us "for our profit". In other words, God's correction is always goal-oriented! And all the **correction** we may apply to our children **must always be goal-oriented**. We must always have a specific goal in mind when we correct our children, something specific we are trying to achieve.

Next, Paul acknowledged that chastening (and Paul really had physical correction of some type in mind) "**afterwards**" yields very positive results. That isn't necessarily always the case, because not all

children respond the same way to correction. As Solomon wrote:

> **A reproof** entereth more into a wise man than **an hundred stripes** into a fool. (Proverbs 17:10)

So while some children may indeed respond to correction like “the wise man” in this proverb, other children may respond like “the fool” in this proverb, never really changing their wrong attitudes, no matter how they are punished. But the lesson from this proverb should be that if the “reproof” didn’t get the desired results, then it may be needed to move on to “the stripes” (i.e. a spanking) that are referred to in this verse.

At any rate, as parents our goal should be that the punishment we decide to administer for a specific transgression or disobedience is aimed at achieving long-term results, i.e. permanent changes for the better in the conduct of our children. And we need to always start out from the premise that our children will respond like “the wise man” in Proverbs 17:10. If it turns out otherwise, then we’ll have to go from there.

Psalm 78 shows that we need to **teach God’s laws** and God’s standards to our children. As verse 6 says: “that the generation to come might know them (i.e. God’s laws), even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children”.

We’ve already looked at Proverbs 3:11-12, which says:

> My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

The point we should take note of at this time is that without correction we will always choose Satan’s way of life! It is because of this NEED to build restraints against Satan’s impulses that God chastens us, and that human fathers are to correct their own children. Solomon was more specific a few chapters later.

> Chasten thy son while there is hope, and **let not thy soul spare for his crying**. (Proverbs 19:18)

Do we actually believe this proverb or not? Frequently it is the mother’s tendency to not punish the child’s clear disobedience. This proverb is OBVIOUSLY not speaking about “child brutality”, or about “beating the child”! It seems pretty obvious that what Solomon had in mind here in this proverb was appropriate spanking in the appropriate place for certain acts of disobedience. Solomon was not speaking about a father “lashing out in anger”! No, this is speaking about an emotionally very calm and controlled parent administering a very appropriate spanking “while there is still hope” that this spanking will motivate the child to reject the attitude of rebellion and disobedience. Under no circumstances does this proverb condone child brutality.

These same comments also apply to Proverbs 23:13-14.

> Withhold not correction from the child: for **if thou beatest him with the rod**, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. (Proverbs 23:13-14)

“Beating with the rod” sounds very much like child brutality to us. But that isn’t really the meaning that is intended in these verses. While some of the modern Bible translations are often more like paraphrases

than actual translations, in this particular instance there are two which express the intended meaning more accurately in our context, in which certain words have taken on emotionally charged meanings, than the KJV.

So notice how these verses are rendered in The Message Bible by Eugene Peterson:

> **Don't be afraid to correct** your young ones; **a spanking won't kill them. A good spanking**, in fact, might save them from something worse than death. (Proverbs 23:13-14, The Message Bible)

Yes, this translation does miss the intended meaning in the last part of this verse, because Peterson was thinking of "hell fire". The last part actually means: "a good spanking might save them from death", rather than "something worse than death".

But Peterson is correct in translating this in our modern context as "a good spanking", rather than as "a beating".

Another modern translation, "God's Word to the Nations", translates these verses as follows:

> **Do not hesitate to discipline a child. If you spank him**, he will not die. **Spank him** yourself, and you will save his soul from hell. (Proverbs 23:13-14, God's Word to the Nations Version, GWV)

If in this translation the word "hell" was replaced by the words "the grave" (which is what the Hebrew means), then this would be a perfectly accurate translation for these two verses.

The point is that these verses speak about spanking when appropriate, and not about "beating" a child! But let's notice **the reason Solomon has given for spanking the child**. Solomon's point is: if a child is not spanked when the child's conduct has really called for a spanking, then the child is at a greater risk of dying young, because the foolish conduct will become entrenched in the child's life.

This is a point that modern "experts" don't like, but it is a fact! Whenever we, adults or children, are able to transgress some law or instruction without incurring any penalties or punishments, then that transgression will become entrenched in our character. This is the principle of Ecclesiastes 8:11, which says:

> Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore **the heart** of the sons of men **is fully set in them to do evil**. (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

That ALWAYS happens! If we can commit adultery, lie, steal, rob, kill, defile the Sabbath, insult people, take God's name in vain, engage in perverse conduct, etc., without ever having to face any punishment or penalty, then our hearts "become fully set" in doing those evil things!

And this is the greatest danger with the permissive no-punishments-allowed approach to child-rearing. Without the fear of punishments transgressions of God's laws in any area of life always look attractive, and they will always win out. Without the very real danger of punishments for violations of God's laws no human being would ever attain unto salvation. That is why God will always chastise us **for our good**, to keep alive our opportunity for immortal life in His Family. And the correct reason for punishing the disobedience of children is to keep them alive, as Proverbs 23:14 says.

It should be pretty obvious why the god of this present age has inspired a hostility and resentment towards the godly way of administering punishments for disobedience. Without those punishments Satan will have unrestricted access to the minds of our children, effectively destroying them.

Earlier I mentioned that godly child-rearing is a battle between the parents and Satan over the control of the child's mind. And physical correction (i.e. spanking) is **the most powerful tool** or weapon which God has given to the parents to confront and to defeat Satan's influence on our children. Taking that one tool away from parents is like asking us to fight Satan with one arm tied behind our back; it puts the parents at a huge disadvantage in opposing Satan's influence. (Physical correction is a "tool" in dealing with our children, and a "weapon" in confronting and resisting Satan.)

Notice two more verses from Proverbs.

> **The rod and reproof** give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. (Proverbs 29:15)

Let's see this verse in the GWV translation:

> **A spanking and a warning** produce wisdom, but **an undisciplined child** disgraces his mother. (Proverbs 29:15 GWV)

The point is that a spanking and verbal correction must always go together. The spanking is designed to make the child's mind receptive to the verbal correction that will follow, and to eliminate an arguing response from the child.

Two verses later Solomon wrote:

> **Correct thy son**, and he shall give thee rest; yea, **he shall give delight unto thy soul**. (Proverbs 29:17)

Appropriate correction, applied in an appropriate way, is an essential part of godly child-rearing. As Paul said in Hebrews 12, our own fathers corrected us when we needed it, and "we gave them reverence" (verse 9). When appropriate physical correction is administered fairly and consistently, then this produces a feeling of confidence and security in the children, because they know what to expect.

Let's look at another statement by Solomon.

> He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. (Proverbs 13:24)

This verse is also translated closer to the intended meaning in the GWV Bible.

> **Whoever refuses to spank his son hates him**, but **whoever loves his son disciplines him from early on**. (Proverbs 13:24 GWV)

This is the truth! Don't let modern experts confuse you on this matter. A really genuine love and concern for our children will motivate us to discipline them "**from early on**" whenever discipline is needed. That

type of discipline has nothing in common with “beating a child” or with child brutality. The Bible in both, the Old Testament and the New Testament, is filled with specific instructions intended to guide parents in raising their children in a godly fashion. And those instructions include spanking where appropriate.

We have already referred to Proverbs 22:15. Let’s now look at the GWV translation of this verse.

> **Foolishness is firmly attached to a child’s heart. Spanking will remove it** far from him. (Proverbs 22:15 GWV)

The reason foolishness is “firmly attached” to the child’s mind is because Satan, the prince of the power of the air, constantly bombards the minds of children with foolish thoughts, and children do not have automatic barriers to those foolish thoughts. That is simply a fact! Are we adults incapable of recalling the utter stupidity of some of our thoughts and ideas when we were young and immature? I mean, you and I did have some harebrained ideas and we did get into foolish situations in our youth, didn’t we? One major problem we all had in those youthful days is that we didn’t have the faintest idea as to where those foolish thoughts of ours had come from. Now, as mature Christians in God’s Church, we ought to recognize that our thoughts back then had all come from the prince of the power of the air.

Now consider: we all did our share of foolish things. But how many more foolish things would we also have done, if it had not been that the prospect of punishments or penalties deterred us from acting on those additional foolish thoughts?

Proverbs 22:15 is a basic child-rearing truth that Satan wants to discredit in whatever way he can!

Let’s now look at verse 6, which puts the whole approach together.

> **Train up a child in the way he should go**: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

In rearing our children we must never lose sight of the two main goals: to build restraints against Satan’s unseen impulses, and to teach right values, knowledge and skills. In this particular verse the expression “he will not depart from it” is NOT a reference to the child’s actions in adulthood. Our children always retain their own free will, and there is no way that any form of child-rearing could force our children to obey God for the rest of their lives. Rather, what the correct form of child-rearing can instill in our children is **THE RIGHT VALUE SYSTEM**, A CONSCIENCE that is in agreement with God’s laws.

We adults, who have made a commitment to God to live by His laws, can and at times still do “depart” from that way in some or other of our actions. In other words, we still sin. So it is unrealistic to expect our children to remain sinless because of what we taught them. Whether or not they will sin depends on how they respond to temptations that will confront them.

So in adulthood our children may at times fall short of “the way they should go” in their conduct and actions, even as we ourselves also at times fall short; but the God-fearing conscience we helped to develop in them, by the right teaching we provided, will stay with them. They will still be potentially just as capable of defiling their consciences as we are. But the right perspective and the right values we instilled in them will remain with them.

Now let’s examine one particularly common form of child-rearing from Satan’s perspective.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?

The approach of parents seeking to please their children is seen most clearly in a statement young parents today will **frequently** make, because this is something modern so-called “experts” have encouraged. When their child is uncooperative or plain rebellious, these parents will frequently say to their young child: “what would you like to do?”. This statement is right out of the script of Satan’s play book. It is the perfect practical representation of Isaiah 3:12 (“children are their oppressors”).

I am talking about parents using this statement at almost every turn, letting the child decide what to eat and what not to eat, what activity the whole family must get involved in, what clothes the child needs to wear, at which restaurant the family is going to eat, etc. I am talking about the small child making decisions that the child has no business making. This is the personification of Satan’s “the parents need to please the child” approach to child-rearing.

This approach will engender extreme selfishness in the child. This extreme selfishness can be seen by the child’s uncontrolled outbursts when the child is denied something. And the child learns very quickly that an outburst of crying, shouting or screaming will put the child into the driver’s seat on that particular issue. But what the child in this situation does NOT learn is self-control!

This approach puts the child into the position of making the decisions, which the parents are then expected to go along with. This approach gives the small child a sense of power, power he does not have and should not have. And since the child is the least qualified to make ANY decisions within the family, this will frequently force the parents to go along with the worst possible choice for whatever the issue may have been. Because one thing is certain: if **an outburst** leads to the parents saying “what do YOU want to do” to the child, then Satan will see to it that the worst choice will be made. **No outburst by a child is ever a manifestation of a right attitude**; it is always a manifestation of an attitude influenced by the god of this age.

Let’s consider how GOD rears us, His children. When we are upset or frustrated, does God ever try to appease us with the “what would you like to do” approach?

When we are faced with two choices, a right one and a wrong one: does God leave us clueless as to which option we really MUST choose? Will God tell us “what would you like to do”, or will God tell us “**THIS IS THE WAY, WALK YOU IN IT**”?

> And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21)

And consider also Deuteronomy 30:

> I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that **I have set before you life and death**, blessing and cursing: **therefore choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live: (Deuteronomy 30:19)

God leaves His children with no doubts as to what is the right decision to make. The only choice God gives His children is: are you going to do what I am telling you to do or not? There are **no other options**.

Parents need to likewise make very clear to their children what is the right course of action to follow, and the only option then is: are you going to do what is right or not?

Next, since this verse reveals precisely how God is going to rear His children during the millennium, should God’s people TODAY use exactly the same approach in raising their own little children? Or does

God expect parents in His Church today to allow their small children to make bad decisions, so they can supposedly learn what it's like to make bad decisions? **Isaiah 30:21 is God's unequivocal answer as to how parents TODAY need to rear their children**.

Listen!

Once they are adults, our children will surely make their own mistakes. At that point in their lives THEY will be responsible for their own decisions. They'll make some mistakes even if we were to do the best possible job in rearing them. Apart from Jesus Christ (i.e. regarding his human life-span), all human beings make some mistakes, including you and including me and including our children when they grow up. BUT WHILE OUR CHILDREN ARE YOUNG AND IMMATURE it is our responsibility as parents to make RIGHT DECISIONS FOR THEM! That is the duty of a parent!! We are to guide our children every step of the way in doing what is right.

> **Rearing our small children with the "what would you like to do?" approach is a dereliction of our parental duties before Almighty God!**

Don't misunderstand what I am saying here.

In the above section I made clear that I am speaking about the parental response to "an outburst" by the young child. I am NOT talking about parents making every single little decision for the child. If in the winter with freezing temperatures outside the child wants to wear light summer clothes, then the parents should intervene. If it is time to go to Church and the child wants to put on some dirty play-clothes, then the parents should likewise intervene. But in normal circumstances it is certainly good to give the child the option of "do want to wear your red shirt or your blue shirt or the striped one?". In other words, the child should usually have the freedom to choose from a range of choices that are already "acceptable" to the parent. That choice from a range of "acceptable" options also applies to things other than clothing. However, there will also be times when the parent says: today I want you to wear THIS outfit; and then the child should not be allowed to argue. And the parent should generally decide what foods the child must eat, to ensure that the child gets a well-balanced nutrition, rather than the junk food diet many children would opt for. We should keep in mind that the prince of the power of the air is the most ardent promoter of junk foods for children.

The point is not that children cannot make any decisions. The point really is that children should never be given the carte blanche option of "what would you like to do?". The parents need to always make clear that any choices the child is allowed to make are always limited to being within the parameters established by the parents. And the parents should never allow the child to make a choice that is clearly wrong! Nor should the child ever be allowed to dictate the activities for the whole family.

The principle of Proverbs 14:12 ("there is a way which SEEMS right unto a man ...") applies even more to little children than it does to adults. We need to recognize that there is a way that will seem right **unto our children**, but the ends thereof are also the ways of death! Let's look again at Galatians 4:1-2.

> Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a **child**, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But **is under tutors and governors** until the time appointed of the father. (Galatians 4:1-2)

This applies to the children of rich men and to the children of poor men. ALL children have this twofold need. Where in the families of rich men these needs might be met by servants in the employ of the father, in poor families these needs would have been met by the parents themselves. These two needs

which Paul is speaking about in these verses are common to all children. And these two needs are:

1) Children need TEACHERS to teach them knowledge and understanding.

2) Children also need GOVERNORS to regulate their conduct and to make right decisions for them.

Children need more than just “tutors”! They also need “governors” to guide and direct all their actions and activities. “Governors” were supposed to make the right decisions for the children under their care. And “governors” are to make such decisions for the children “**until the time appointed**”, i.e. until they reach maturity.

So should parents allow their small children to make bad decisions and wrong choices? No, **parents should NOT allow that**. Instead, parents should LEAD their children by **always** making the best decisions for them. And the children should never be asked to make decisions that are not their business to make, as in decisions that will determine what the family will do, etc. [I am here not talking about petty decisions regarding clothing, etc. as explained above.]

Consider that in biblical times the principle of the parents making all the decisions for the children went so far that it was the parents who still selected a husband for their daughter and a wife for their son. If young adults back then weren’t even allowed to decide for themselves who they could marry, how many lesser decisions were “children” at that time being asked to make? Children simply didn’t make decisions back then, and the “what would you like to do” approach to child-rearing had not yet been invented. I am not suggesting that today parents should be making marriage-decisions for their adult children; but parents should certainly not rear their young children with the “what would you like to do” approach.

Consider also that God Himself commanded His people that a father was responsible for reversing any bad commitment (i.e. decision) that his young adult daughter had made. Likewise, God expects a husband to reverse any bad commitments that his wife has made. That is a different subject which is spelled out in detail in Numbers 30:1-16. But when you see the responsibility God placed on the husband and father regarding “bad decisions” his wife or young adult daughter might make, it should be easy to grasp that God SURELY would not want a father to allow his young children to make bad decisions either.

Can you see that these examples from biblical times are based on the perspective that “it is the responsibility of the children to please their parents”? And can you see that the “what would you like to do” approach is based on the perspective that “it is the responsibility of the parents to please their children”? One approach is godly and the other approach has been inspired by the god of this age.

We don’t learn from bad decisions how to make good decisions, any more than we learn from an accident how to drive a car. Rather, when we are learning how to drive, it is imperative that the parent sitting in the passenger seat intervenes BEFORE WE HAVE AN ACCIDENT! In the same way parents have an obligation to intervene before their small children make a bad decision.

And regarding the reasoning that says: “in order for our children to learn to make right decisions, we must give them the freedom to make some wrong decisions along the way, because that is how they learn to make right decisions” I will tell you “o my people, they which lead you cause you to err and they destroy the way of your paths”.

Learning to make good decisions is not like learning how to drive a car, simply because good decision making is not a PHYSICAL skill. We learn to drive a car by actually sitting behind the wheel and controlling the car, rather than by sitting in the passenger seat. But that’s not how we learn to make wise

decisions.

As children we learn to make wise decisions by EXPERIENCING THE FRUITS of the wise decisions our parents are making. Children learn to make wise decisions **by agreeing with the decisions the parents are making**, even while those decisions are in the process of being made. In the same way we adults are expected to willingly agree with God's decisions that affect our lives, the attitude of "Your will be done on earth (i.e. in my life) as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). In learning to make good decisions we don't really need to "get our hands on the wheel" to know what good decision-making feels like. We just need to experience and discern the good consequences of the way our parents are leading and guiding the family. The time for when the children will have to make those decisions themselves will come soon enough.

So much for this particular approach to child-rearing. Now let's summarize this whole subject by asking and answering 12 basic questions.

12 BASIC QUESTIONS ANSWERED

QUESTION #1: WHAT IS CHILD-REARING?

Child-rearing is a way of imparting our heritage on to our children, a way of perpetuating our culture. Proverbs 22:6 spells this out.

QUESTION #2: WHAT IS IT THAT WE TRAIN AND HOW DOES THIS DIFFER FROM TRAINING AN ANIMAL?

The real aim in child-rearing is to train the spirit in man, the mind. The aim is not merely to train the children regarding certain actions, reflexes or conditioned responses, though these things are included. But the real focus is on teaching the child to always think first, before acting on any thought or impulse. Thinking first includes considering any potential consequences to the intended actions.

QUESTION #3: WHY IS CHILD-REARING NEEDED?

Child-rearing is needed because, as Proverbs 22:15 points out, foolishness is spontaneously present in a child's mind. This, by the way, is not the case with animals. We should never confuse the playfulness of young animals with "the foolishness" in the minds of young children.

QUESTION #4: WHY IS FOOLISHNESS "BOUND UP" IN A CHILD'S MIND?

God did not create us human beings to be inherently foolish at birth. Foolishness is very different from a lack of knowledge, which is what we have at birth. As Ephesians 2:2 explains, it is Satan's influence which results in human beings being spontaneously foolish in childhood. Satan's influence defines the difference between "lacking knowledge" and "being foolish". Being foolish involves a certain frame of mind, one that rejects correct teaching and instructions, one that rejects cooperation with the wishes of the parents.

QUESTION #5: SO WHAT IS GODLY CHILD-REARING?

Let's refine the answer to question #1 a bit more.

Godly child-rearing is essentially a contest between the parents and Satan for control over the mind of the child. It is Satan's explicit goal to control the minds of children as early in life as possible. By nature a child's mind is neutral (in its stance towards God and Satan), but it is spontaneously receptive to

Satan's attitudes and moods. The word "moody" is a synonym for "behaving like Satan".

QUESTION #6: IN THIS CONTEXT WHAT IS PHYSICAL CORRECTION?

Physical correction is the main tool that God has given to parents to counter Satan's influence on the minds of their children. Without this tool of physical correction the parents' attempts to counter Satan's influence in the lives of their children are like trying to play tennis with a badminton racquet; all the power to respond to Satan's attacks has been taken from the parents. In Hebrews 12 Paul explained that God uses this tool of physical correction very extensively in dealing with us, and if God did not use this one tool, then none of us would ever make it into God's kingdom. Parents who don't use this tool of physical correction are severely handicapping the emotional development of their own children! By "emotional development" I am specifically referring to "developing self-control" and "resisting selfishness".

QUESTION #7: HOW DOES SATAN WANT TO INFLUENCE US REGARDING PHYSICAL CORRECTION?

Satan always wants people to go to extremes. On this issue Satan wants parents to EITHER voluntarily throw this tool away OR else Satan wants parents to misuse this tool in the form of child brutality. Misuse destroys the usefulness of any tool, like smashing a tennis racquet. Thus society will set these two extremes, permissiveness (i.e. throw the tool away) and child brutality (destroy the tool through misuse), as the only possible options. This ensures that nobody is easily able to take a balanced middle position of proper and appropriate physical correction when needed. What God's people need to understand is that permissiveness in child-rearing is just as evil before God as is child brutality, and it is Satan who wants parents to throw this God-given tool away, or else to misuse it.

QUESTION #8: HOW SHOULD PARENTS CORRECT THEIR CHILDREN?

That is not for me to decide! This is something that parents must always decide for themselves. This is something I decided for our four children, but not for other people's children. Every single child is different from every other child, and without question there are SOME children who should NEVER, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, be spanked! But that is something for parents themselves to decide.

Parents are responsible before God for doing the best they can, and all of the Scriptures we have looked at are for parents to evaluate in their own specific circumstances. Possible options for punishing disobedience include stern reprimands, temporary isolation, removal of privileges and spanking. But which of these to use in which circumstances is something parents must always decide for themselves. And we should not assume that the extreme theoretical examples, which the advocates of permissiveness can reel off at a moment's notice, should define the norm for all other children. In this area you as a parent must reach your own decisions, and all the Scriptures we have examined are there to guide you.

QUESTION #9: WHAT IS IT THAT PARENTS SHOULD CORRECT FOR?

The most important issue that parents should correct their children for is for having the wrong attitudes of: anger, jealousy, selfishness, hatred, rebellion, vanity, deception, lying, resentment, temper, moodiness, hypocrisy, greed, carelessness, etc. These wrong attitudes are the real causes for problems that arise. And this is the area where most parents, who do in some ways correct the wrong conduct of their children, fall short; they mostly don't correct their children for wrong attitudes!

Secondly, parents should correct their children for wrong conduct and wrong actions. But here the parents should always keep in mind that these wrong actions are really the outward manifestations of some of the wrong attitudes mentioned above.

A wrong action without a wrong attitude is nothing more than a simple mistake, and should always warrant a far lesser punishment (e.g. perhaps a serious verbal admonition?) than the same wrong action resulting from a wrong attitude. For example, there is a difference between a child totally unintentionally dropping something and that child deliberately dropping that same object.

As the Apostle Peter told Simon Magus:

> Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the **thought of thine heart** may be forgiven thee. (Acts 8:22)

In the case of Simon Magus the thoughts of his heart had at that point not yet been translated into any wrong actions. But the fact that he had a wrong attitude (i.e. “the thoughts of his heart”) was a major problem. And in child-rearing parents need to always keep in mind that the thoughts of the heart are always the most important component of any problem. If the thoughts of the heart are right, and the problem is nothing more than a genuine, unintentional mistake, then there is no real problem.

Jesus Christ also elaborated on this aspect.

> Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but **that which cometh out of the mouth**, this defileth a man. (Matthew 15:11)
>
> But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For **out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies**: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. (Matthew 15:18-20)

It is in childhood that these wrong attitudes, broadcast and instilled by Satan, must be confronted. Never allow a child’s wrong actions or conduct to distract you from focusing on and confronting the wrong attitude that underlies the wrong actions.

QUESTION #10: WHAT IS PUNISHMENT SUPPOSED TO ACHIEVE?

The main goals some form of punishment for disobedience is supposed to achieve, are:

1. To help the child to build some restraints against the wrong thoughts and impulses that Satan, the power of the airwaves, constantly broadcasts; and to help the child to recognize the origin of those wrong thoughts.

2. To realize the seriousness of wrong attitudes and wrong or careless actions. Romans 6:23 (“the wages of sin are death”) is a serious statement which applies to all of us.

3. To shape and mold the child’s conscience, to distinguish between right and wrong.

4. To establish justice, because our actions and our attitudes invariably also affect other people. And wrong actions or attitudes typically cause pain for someone. Even unintentional careless actions may cause problems for other people.

QUESTION #11: SO EXACTLY WHAT MUST GODLY CHILD-REARING TEACH?

Godly child-rearing must teach: true values based on God’s Word, self-restraint, the fear of God, and

true knowledge.

<u>QUESTION #12</u>: IN WHAT WAYS DO PARENTS IN GENERAL TRY TO REAR THEIR CHILDREN?

The most common forms of child-rearing today are:

1. The permissive approach of tolerance for disobedience and “unconditional acceptance” (a major slogan of the permissive lobby). This approach produces extreme selfishness and a lack of self-control. It leads to Isaiah 3:12. We need to recognize that God will NEVER, NEVER accept anyone “unconditionally”! If people do not repent of their rebellion and change their disobedient ways, then they will never be accepted by God. God sets very clear requirements for accepting people, effectively summarized in the statement “IF YOU BE WILLING AND OBEDIENT” in Isaiah 1:19. The word “if” always introduces conditions for any statement.

2. The reasoning approach. This always leads to justifying the guilty party (in this case the child or children) in one way or another. The servant who was given only one talent in the parable in Matthew 25 was not cut any slack, considering his poorer circumstances, in comparison to the other two servants who had been given either five talents or two talents. The lesson is that our circumstances or our background are before God never a mitigating factor when we do something that is wrong.

We need to clearly understand that when we (the same applies to our children) do something that is wrong, then the “WHY we did it” is never a justification for the wrong actions. That’s God’s approach as made clear in the Bible, but that’s not something we like, because when we are the ones who have done wrong, then we typically want people to know that in our circumstances we were justified in doing wrong, that when you understand the background to our wrong actions, then it becomes clear that we were right in doing wrong ... if you know what I mean? That’s how we reason, and that is what Proverbs 21:2 tells us (“every way of a man is right in his own eyes, **but** ...”).

But that approach will not be accepted by God. And we should not allow our children to justify their disobedience (there may be extremely rare exceptions to this?) by reasoning out ways that are designed to make disobedience look right (unless the whole matter involves a genuine misunderstanding, in which case there is no attitude problem).

3. The occasional discipline approach. Amongst those parents that still do believe in punishing disobedience this approach is fairly common. This inconsistency produces insecurity and uncertainty in the child. The child never knows whether a specific disobedience is going to be punished or not. This is really a hybrid version of the permissive approach. Whenever some correction is applied to the child, it is usually an expression of the parent finally saying “I’ve had enough of your disobedience”! So this form of correction can rightly be seen as “retaliation” by the parent, and that is obviously a bad thing! Here the correction has no relation to the two great goals of child-rearing.

4. The very strict approach with almost militaristic discipline. This approach produces fear and insecurity in the child, and it typically lacks any feeling for the child. The child is viewed as an object that simply must obey everything the parent says, no matter how ridiculous that may be in some cases.

I believe all four of these approaches to child-rearing are wrong before God. In this article I have presented a fifth option. That fifth option is the consistent application of balanced and measured correction. **The parents** evaluate every single situation of disobedience on its own circumstances (here we are not talking about the child trying to justify his wrong actions), and they decide which form of correction is appropriate for which situation, by carefully taking the child’s specific circumstances into account (is it a 2-year old or a 10-year old, etc.). In all the forms of punishment they may administer for acts or attitudes of disobedience they always keep the two great goals of child-rearing uppermost in their

minds. And whenever they are faced with acts of disobedience, they recognize that their real focus is not on fighting “against flesh and blood”. They are also very keenly tuned to recognizing child-rearing practices that are based on the “the parents need to please the children” perspective. In this fifth approach the focus is on training and teaching and developing the minds of their children.

The real enemy in child-rearing is Satan, the prince of the power of the air, and it is Satan’s influence in our children that this godly method of child-rearing seeks to eliminate.

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