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The Drama of Parenting— Parenting 551

Ephesians 6:1-4

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I. Introduction.

- A. Last Lord's Day we learned a bit on the nature of the art of disciplining children. Today we will consider the flip side of that responsibility and speak on repentance.
- B. Review.
 1. The need for physical discipline exists because of sin. Folly abounds, as a result, in our hearts. God has ordained that **one aspect** of addressing that sin and foolishness is discipline.
 2. Physical discipline does not operate on its own. It function alongside other very important aspects of parenting such as: encouragement, appeals, exhortations, instruction, warnings and rebukes.
 3. By using physical discipline the child is taught two basic ideas.
 - a. There are *consequences* to sinful behavior.
 - b. They are *accountable* for their behavior.
 4. Some basic points regarding the parent and discipline:
 - a. It is done in faith.
 - b. It is your responsibility. "A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him" (Proverbs 17:25).
 - c. It is obedience to God.
 - d. It is physical in nature. "On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding" (Proverbs 10:13).
 - e. It has a salvific sense to it. "Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol [the grave/death/hell]" (Proverbs 23:13).

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5. We saw in Hebrews 12 that when we discipline our children we are modeling one aspect of our Heavenly Father's relationship to us as His children.
6. Finally, what happens if it doesn't seem to "work?" I gave you several reasons but one of them is worth repeating and another one needs to be added.
 - a. First, let me repeat that perhaps the most common reason discipline is not showing any fruit is that the husband and wife are not of one mind on this.
 - b. Second, let me add that you must not let your emotions control when, why and how you discipline. Emotions are in a constant state of change. We must train ourselves to allow sound theology and wisdom to direct us. This is a huge component in child-rearing.
- C. Now we can turn our minds to the other side of discipline, its fruit.

II. Repentance.

- A. Repentance is the hand-maiden of chastisement. You are trying reach the heart of the child so that you can witness them repent.
- B. We never just discipline for its own sake. We always seek to move the child toward good, proper and wise change. That is nothing more than repentance.
- C. Distinctions of terms.
 1. The Bible primarily speaks of repentance as an aspect of salvation. This is the ultimate goal of the parent, but not necessarily the type of repentance that you will be trying to see in your children.
 2. Obviously, if your child is not saved, repentance unto salvation is the goal. But along the way, there is still the need to develop in the child a proper sense of "everyday repentance" which will carry into their lives even as a Christian.
 - a. This type of repentance is the idea of turning away from wrong, sinful actions and attitudes and turning toward those that are proper and right.
 - b. The Bible speaks of this in Ephesians and Colossians as "putting off and putting on" (cf. Ephesians 4, Colossians 3). Simply put, it is the process of turning away from wrong things and replacing them with right things.

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D. The repentance God calls us to have.

1. Before I go into the practical side of repentance with regard to parenting and discipline I want to take us through some passages related to how God calls us as humans to repent.

Some will try to argue that the passages I am using are either in coming to God for salvation or as a Christian who is called to repent of sin in their life. The common conclusion then is that we can't use these with regard to our unsaved children because we aren't God and they aren't Christians.

My rejoinder to this is that one aspect of parenting your children is to teach them how to live before God as their Lord and Savior. Think about some of the parenting terms used: fear/respect/honor; obey; follow; repent; discipline; instruction, and wisdom are all terms used often in the bible to reflect our relationship to God.

It is a short-sighted parent who thinks they should not expect their children to act in a manner consistent with a follower of Christ. That should be something every child does from an early age. This includes learning to read the bible consistently, praying themselves, obeying, living in an awareness of God's presence and His holiness and a host of others.

2. In the Old Testament:

- a. "The Bible is rich in idioms describing man's responsibility in the process of repentance. Such phrases would include the following: 'incline your heart unto the Lord your God' (Josh 24:23); 'circumcise yourselves to the Lord' (Jer 4:4); 'wash your heart from wickedness' (Jer 4:14); 'break up your fallow ground' (Hos 10:12) and so forth. All these expressions of man's penitential activity, however, are subsumed and summarized by this one verb *shûb*. For better than any other verb it combines in itself the two requisites of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good" (*TWOT*, s.v. "שׁוּב", by V. P. Hamilton, 2:909).

That last part defines the purpose of parenting children incredibly well.

- b. Jeremiah 25:5.
- c. Jeremiah 31:18-20.

3. In the New Testament.

- a. Matthew 3:2, 8.

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- b. Acts 26:19-20.
- c. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (keep their bible open there).

E. Initial Observations:

1. What I am going to teach here is not merely for small children you have disciplined. In a much more important sense it should help guide you as your children grow and move into young adulthood. A 4 year old's sin is usually clean and simple. A 14 year old is far more subtle and complex in actions and attitudes.
2. James says in 2:26 that faith with out works is a dead faith. There is nothing there. Notice how in Matthew 3 and Acts 26 that the call was a repentance with appropriate deeds/fruit.
 - a. This is the same idea. Genuine repentance is not words. It is proper actions.
 - b. When you discipline your child you also need to make sure to point them in the proper direction. Ideally that was done first, but sometimes it will have to follow the discipline.
 - c. Do not mistake words, emotions, and such for actual fruit. That is something that is clear and observable.
3. It is worth noting that with Israel we are speaking of people usually who were not true followers/believers in YHWH, yet they were part of the covenant people.
 - a. In light of that, they knew what God expected of them. There was nothing unique to what John the Baptist was telling them as they came out to him in the wilderness to be baptized.
 - b. And it is key to note that God, through His prophets, did not shy away from calling them to turn their hearts and ways back toward Him.
 - c. This correlates well with children growing up in a Christian home. They, unlike many young people, should be raised in an environment that is rich in what God calls His people to be and do.
4. In 2 Corinthians 7 note that in vss 9-10 there are two types of sadness or sorrow. One to salvation and one to death.

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- a. As a pastor who has sat with countless people caught or trapped in sin this is something well observed. Usually they are all sad, but you learn to not assume all sadness over sin is the same.
 - b. Applying this into parenting and it tells me that I should not be too quick to assume that my child's sadness, crying, and words of regret mean anything serious or good. That emotion will then move them toward the right actions or nothing of note.
5. Vs 11 is also helpful in seeing attitudes that accompany genuine repentance. Note the word "innocent" at the end. It also means holy or pure. Paul is speaking of how he is able to know that their repentance was genuine.
- a. You could basically take the first part of vs 11 and the last part and see them as speaking of the same thing. This godly sorrow produced something and it is the same thing as how they proved themselves to be innocent.
 - b. What is in between these two points are the various attitudes that help make clear true repentance.
 - (1) First, there is an eagerness to become vindicated. To clear yourself as ESV says. There is an awareness that you have done wrong and you need to get that resolved and clear your name.
 - (2) Second, there an indignation. This is not directed at the person bringing the discipline but at oneself. You need to fix this and as a result you own your sin and you own the consequences and you do what is necessary to resolve everything.
 - (3) Third, there is a fear. You realize you are caught and though it is never fun to be caught you know it is good. There is a fear as your rationalizations are torn away and you see the fearful place you are now in. An awareness of the break in the relationship between you and God, or in this situation, you and your parents.
 - (4) Fourth, a deep longing, yearning is present. A desire to be reconciled and to have the relationship back as it ought to be.

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- (5) Fifth, a zeal to get this fixed. As the bible describes elsewhere, to be zealous to good works. When you see your child rebuked and disciplined and they are still slow to act and obey you know they are not yet repentant. You never have to push a repentant child, they push themselves.
 - (6) Finally, a sense of justice. Here the idea is to embrace the consequences of the sin and disobedience. To see it for what it is and to make no excuses for it.
- c. Take any of these by themselves and you can be possibly deceived. But take them together and the picture painted is quite stark. And it will likely reveal that you have seen much less real repentance than perhaps you thought.
- F. General Thoughts on True Repentance.
1. The ultimate goal is to see the child turn away from the wrong action. We need to have the same message to our children that John the Baptist had to the Pharisees that we just looked at, “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8).
 2. Sometimes this is a process. An example would be in the area of self-control. Perhaps the child has a hard time showing self-control in talking. They easily interrupt and share their opinions without permission. If this has been a long term problem, the child may need a while to change the behavior. The ultimate fruit may be several months in the making. However, there will still be clear, observable indications along the way that the child is repentant of that problem.
 3. Most times, however, you can see the fruit of repentance quickly. The child is disciplined and immediately begins to do the right thing. This may be cleaning his room, seeking another’s forgiveness, or making restitution to the wronged person.
 4. As a rule, you need to discipline your child for wrong behavior until you begin to see true fruit of repentance. At that time you want to switch from the rebuke and correction to that of exhortation and encouragement.
 5. Sinful actions create a breakdown in relationships. When you have sinned against God, you lose the joy of your salvation. You also lose out in blessing. Repentance, as already stated, is not merely the turning away from something; rather it is the turning to Someone.

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- a. Within parenting this needs to be practiced. The child who disobeys is breaking a relationship bond between you and himself. The value spanking of the child is often lost because the parent then quickly picks up the child and reaffirms his love for him.
 - b. It is wise to have the child come to you. They need to understand that they have violated a relationship with you and that they need to repair it.
 - (1) Perhaps sending the child to their room for a few minutes after the discipline is all that is needed. Sometimes just pausing right after the discipline is enough.
 - (2) I have found that most children want to reassert their relationship with their parents very quickly. The common way that they do this is through hugs and kisses. Others want to spend some time cuddling.
 - (3) With older children it is more common to have them want to help you do some chore, or to simply talk with you.
- G. False Repentance.
- 1. Crying is not repentance. Often children will show tremendous sorrow for their actions. They will burst out crying as they are being taken to the room for discipline. At times parents will be tempted to view this crying as a sign that the child has “learned his lesson” and not spank them. As a rule, this is unwise.
 - 2. Saying things like, “I am so sorry Mommy, I won’t do that again” is often sufficient for parents to withhold discipline. The problem is that the child quickly learns that this is an easy way to manipulate the parent. Remember, words can be very cheap, but the result of living by cheap words is very expensive.
 - 3. One way to see if a child is repentant is by the consistent use of discipline.
 - a. If a child says he is sorry for a sin, but then becomes angry when you still discipline him, he fails to understand true repentance. Repenting does not remove consequences. This applies just as easily to older children and teens.
 - b. A biblical example would be King David. He sinned against God by committing adultery. He did repent of his sin, but God did not withhold the discipline, the consequences were still carried out.
- H. Some final suggestions.

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1. Make yourself available for them to repent. Nothing is worse than to discipline the child and then immediately drive off for the evening.
2. Make certain that you are clear about the right way that they are to be living. Don't discipline them, "just because." Make it clear what they did wrong, but make it even more clear about what they are to be doing right. In other words, point them in the way of repentance.
3. If the child is saved, then help them in their confession to the Lord. At times you may wonder if the child has only made a profession of faith. If you see that they are holding onto sinful patterns, especially heart attitudes, then challenge them in the reality of their faith. That doesn't mean to proclaim that they "can't be saved." It means to call them to examine the truthfulness of their profession, to test themselves to see if they are in the faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5).
4. If the child is not saved, then remember to point them to the Lord. They need to see that they are merely living out the results of a sinful heart. They need to see that though you are trying to control behavior in them, you cannot (nor can they) change their heart.

III. Conclusion.

A. Final exhortations:

1. Be sober-minded when considering your children.
2. Reject the many definitions being pushed by the age we live in.
3. Physical discipline without caring, wise instruction achieves little.
4. Don't make it a huge deal.
5. Pray for you and your children.
6. Keep things simple in your standards — obey and respect.
7. If you make an exception make sure it really is an exception.

B. Model to your children what it looks like to trust and hope in God through Jesus Christ.

1. Humility.
2. Obedience.
3. Word-centered.
4. Gospel-oriented.