

“The Responsibilities of Christian Parenthood”

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[Delivered at Southern Pastoral Conference S.E. Wisconsin District November 10, 1970]

The responsibilities of parenthood has become a much discussed, debated, and analyzed subject in recent years. The range of these talks in private and in various groups extend from care in infancy to adulthood of children. These discussions take up various topics such as: whether or not to have children and/or how many per family unit; who should care for them at the various age levels; methods and means of closing the communication gap between parent and child; the extent and kind of discipline required or permitted; providing for physical and educational needs; how much time is to be devoted to the child by the parent, teacher, or other supervisor, etc. Most of these things are basic and clear to the Christian parent, however, the world of parents and children without Christ and without Scripture for a guide finds itself in a thoroughly unhappy and dangerous muddle. The point of extreme danger to Christian parents and children is that they frequently are influenced by what is thought to be sound logic, grand rhetoric, convincing arguments, and worldly wisdom. These often stand in direct contradiction to the Scriptures.

The debates, discussions and friendly little talks of parent groups, PTA's, university lectures and dialog, and extensive reading of books by authors of renown on the subject will be fruitless until they are based upon and drawn from God's Word. Much more could be gained if the parents spent as much time being with their children, playing, working, teaching, and talking as the time devoted to debating, wondering, and worrying about how to be a good and responsible parent.

Anyone might become involved in endless debate and argument on this subject as to what is best, and how to go about the business of being a good parent, or proposing personal ideas and solutions. However, what is debated extensively in unchristian circles is clear to the Christian parent because the Bible speaks with all authority and finality on the subject of parenthood and its responsibilities.

Have Children!

The first point which is taken up here is the responsibility to have children as opposed to purposely avoiding these precious gifts of God. Many logical reasons are offered why children are to be avoided or at least limited. There are fears of mass starvation as the population explodes. The sickly excuse of not being able to afford so many or any children is another excuse, or some, being more polite, may say that they don't want any of their children to be deprived of certain things as they were. Still others avoid parenthood for other purely selfish reasons.

The choice of going childless is today a rather simple matter. The means to contraception are readily available in many forms. What was once spoken of in private or in the corner is now blasted into the public's ear by forceful repetition through the mediums of radio, T.V., books, magazines, newspaper articles, etc. Trying to be somewhat discreet and correct about the sordid matter these things are supposed to be restricted to the married and adult. However, there is open resistance even to that restriction. An article in the Milwaukee Journal, September 29, 1970, states: A resolution by Supervisor Lawrence W. Timmerman would have the board sponsor legislation to remove the present ban on the sale of contraceptive articles to unmarried persons.”

In the same article: "I've never heard an unwed mother express pleasure in giving birth to an illegitimate child," Mrs. Calvin Gander, president of the Responsible Parenthood Association of Wisconsin told the committee." Another morsel of wisdom was offered: "I believe in morality, but we must face situations as they are," said Mrs. Margaret Hoben, who spoke in support of Timmerman's resolution."

If however, contraception fails to be successful, then there is always the easy road of abortion, after all, the public is told, we must "understand" the freedom of the individual and respect her choice and decision in such a personal matter.

On the other hand, medical science has made it possible to increase the potential of pregnancy, births, and multiple births. Even in the cases where the husband may be impotent artificial insemination is offered as a means to conception.

The Christian is in the world and therefore confronted by these many possibilities. Thanks be to God that He has spoken clearly from the beginning without changes, modifications, or qualifications in His unchangeable Word. The familiar directive to Adam and Eve rings out clearly, Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," and, I Timothy 5:14, "I will, therefore, that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house..."

Moreover, contrary to the world's idea of children being the results of someone's will or machine-like procedure, they are still the precious gifts of God. Genesis 33:5 "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant." Psalm 127:3 "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord." One of the primary purposes of marriage therefore is to have children as God's blessings and then also to assume all the responsibilities of parenthood.

Physical Care Of Children

Physical care as a responsibility of parenthood begins already with pregnancy. Fathers and mothers-to-be will exercise added caution and care to protect the miracle in progress. Doctors will be consulted, medicines and diets observed as directed, proper but not excessive exercise, and detailed preparations to receive with joy the new gift of God. These tense and apprehensive times of joy and excitement are too often taken away by the professional abortionists who remove the unwanted tumor with the skill of a clumsy butcher, not considering this a work of God, a gift of life, and an everlasting soul.

All parents are responsible for the physical care of their children. The Bible says so and the laws of nature and the land agree that these basic needs be supplied by the parent. The mother offers her tender loving care in most cases. In most cases because there are some who reject the infant leaving it on some doorstep, bury it, throw it in a river, or the infant may be left to a professional nurse or other caretaker. The latest revolt by the "Women's Liberation" is demanding that the fathers spend equal time in the care of children, even in their infancy and early years.

The physical care of children as a responsibility of parenthood may go to either extreme of too little or too much. There being too little food, clothing, medical and dental care is often the result of poor management of the little financial income there is. Nor is it an isolated case that many children suffer want because of selfish parents who pamper themselves and make entertainment and pleasure the priority.

The other extreme of too much may also and often is dangerous and harmful to children. The well-to-do often give their offspring everything they need or want to excess in substitute for themselves and their time. There are so many complaints from young people who are sensitive to

the fact that they are being bought off with all possible physical needs and extras but are deprived of the companionship, care, concern, guidance and love of father and mother.

What are the responsibilities of Christian parenthood with regard to an even balance of the physical needs of children? I Timothy 5:8 states clearly: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse then an infidel." II Corinthians 12:14, "for children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." Anyone who is faithful will, to the best of his ability, provide willingly and wisely for the total care of the physical well being of his children. However, parents today may find more difficulty in withholding material things from children than in providing sufficiently. It is always a pleasure to see children who receive clothing and other needs with grateful attitude and express great joy to receive some special gifts. Such a child stands in sharp contrast to the other which makes "demands" of the parent without even a hint of gratitude.

Christian parenthood will in any and all cases of caring for their children be conscious of our Heavenly Father's promise to care for us as His dear children. So also we have been given the responsibility of caring for those put in our charge. The familiar passages of Scripture are grasped in faith by the Christian parent to put away all doubts and fears so that we trust Him when He says Psalm 145:15-16, "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Matthew 6:32, "For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." A study of the 4th petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" gives further confidence with regard particularly to our physical well-being. The 4th commandment also leads us into the knowledge that God dispenses our worldly needs and blessings through our superiors in general but in particular through parents as a God-given responsibility.

Educational Care And Discipline Of Children

The educational responsibilities of parents for their children have been largely given over to the government so that parents often times are aware only of the school schedule of days in school and out. In an effort to instruct the parents with regard to the education of their children and what's going on at school various methods of communication have been tried and only to a small degree are successful in the formation of PTAs, the school paper, or bulletins which try to involve the interest of the parents and keep them informed.

The alert Christian parent will make his children aware of certain questionable and unscriptural things which will be taught in the public schools, such as evolution or some of the recent sex education courses. In this day of permissiveness and offering total education there is much discussion and resistance regarding the introduction of sex education in the most explicit and repulsive terms and pictures which are far ahead of the child's development both mentally and physically.

As the children mature and attend places of higher education the dangers, temptations, and sins increase. A quotation taken from the Milwaukee Journal illustrates the concern of parents: "Federal Communications Commission chairman, Dean Burch, said he looked forward to his children attending school "like the plague": because of the drug problem."

Any concerned Christian parent today has not only misgivings but deep concern about the education and contacts children will have in the public schools. Because the Church recognized many failings in the public school system long ago she has undertaken the expense of

providing qualified Christian Day Schools, High Schools, and colleges. While Christian education does not offer any absolute or foolproof guarantee that every child will be exemplary yet, we trust the word of Solomon, Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Isaiah 38:19, "the father to thy children shall make known thy truth." The Christian Day School or High School surely is not to be a substitute for parental education but in addition to and an extension of the Christian home.

Discipline of the children is also a responsibility of parenthood. If parents will not take this responsibility no one else can because the laws of the land today forbid or at least repress disciplining by representatives of parents in school, on the street, or away from home. Elders are freely mocked, teachers are often scoffed and shown contempt, and police officers are insulted, stoned, and even killed. The great worldwide problem of lack of discipline, fear, and honor of parents and all who are in authority-otherwise referred to as the establishment-is not just another fad or era of youthful foolishness, but it is my personal conviction that the proportions have grown to another fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ concerning the signs of the end. Mark 13:12-13. "Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son: and children shall rise up against their parents and shall cause them to be put to death. 13. And ye shall be hated of all men for my names's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

In recent years the dangers of drugs have invaded the schools to add to grave parental apprehension. Necessarily, therefore, education must include instructions and warnings concerning the dangers and effects of drugs both to the body, mind and soul. Children must be taught to be alert to peddlers who are often one of the crowd.

The responsibilities of Christian parenthood as regards education and discipline are imperative for the physical and spiritual preservation of the child. Discipline must begin early and with what may seem to be a callus heart when gentler persuasion and correction fail, but a good old-fashioned spanking is still one of the basic and fundamental means to discipline. Proverbs 13:24 "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Proverbs 19:18 "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." Proverbs 22:15, "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." The consequences of a lack of discipline bring shame to parents and is a burden of their irresponsibility. Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." God spoke of and punished Eli's indulgence I Samuel 3:18, "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

What are the tools that Christian parents have in their responsibilities over against the children? We have the Scriptures as our guide which also are to be given to the children that they may observe the pleasures of the Lord in obedience. In addition to the Word of God the example of Christian parents can best educate and discipline. This means also to take the time to be with them. With the exception of a famine of God's Word parental unconcern and lack of time for children is the greatest cause of most problems. No time for the children to play with them, work with them, or do things as a family. The family unit concept is swiftly disappearing. Children are so eager to tell of and discuss their little experiences and the important little happenings of the day, but mother and dad have no time even to listen. Their disinterest is made quite clear and the child turns elsewhere for attention and recognition. The reasons for parents' lack of interest and time for children are many and mostly unacceptable. Not to be excused from this serious error of not enough time for the children are Christian parents who also fall so easily into this danger.

Pastors and Teachers may easily fall into the category of irresponsible parents when it comes to sharing their time with the family. He may think to excuse himself because he is so involved with the Lord's business, but even this holy work is no excuse if the children are suffering or will be endangered because they are starved for parental attention.

Spiritual Training

Lastly, but surely not the least of the responsibilities of Christian parenthood is the requirement for solid spiritual training in the truths of the Bible. Spiritual training is not to be thought of as an optional extra but this is laid squarely upon parents as a duty and requirement to present children with studies in God's Word. Once again and too often this responsibility is handed quite easily to others. In some cases the business of spiritual matters is left exclusively to the church as a substitute for parents. While the church surely is there to assist parents with regular instruction of children in the Sunday School, Day School, Instruction classes, Bible classes, etc. yet, the most benefit will be derived from Christian homelife table prayers, devotions, Bible stories and doctrinal discussion, that the name of Jesus may become a household word, that His name may be just as familiar as those of the household. Parents will be good examples and offer Christian Scriptural advice when problems arise or counsel is sought. Entertainment will not be of the questionable kind. Deuteronomy 6:7 "And thou shalt teach them dilligently unto thy children And shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house , and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

The responsibilities of Christian parenthood as regards the spiritual care of the child begins with an early Baptism. Most Christian parents observe this first step of spiritual care fairly well. Sometimes, however, it is not so much the spiritual joy and obedience to Christ's command that prompts baptism but rather baptism may be thought of as a kind of public announcement of the birth, a reason or excuse for celebrating, or a family reunion, or perhaps family or community pressure brings baptism about.

A good beginning will be followed by prayer for the child even as sponsors promise faithfully to pray for those children to whom they are sponsor. As soon as the infant comes to a degree of understanding, he will be told simple Bible stories, followed by Sunday School, Christian Day School, together with regular attendance of the church services. At the proper time formal instructions will begin and conclude in confirmation. However, a parent is not released from spiritual care and responsibilities even after confirmation. So long as the parent lives he will be responsible to son or daughter in spiritual matters. After the child is married and leaves home the responsibilities will not be so strenuously enforced.

Scripture is clear as to who is responsible for the Spiritual training of children, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."