

“The Gospel Battle on the Home Front” Article for the Chalcedon Website

Ronald Kirk
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My heart fills with a poignant theme. No, this isn't about the battle of the sexes nor of the generations. The world and America in particular are engaged in a life and death struggle over the ascendancy of the City of God or the City of Man, between the faith of Jesus Christ or the impulse and institutionalization of sin. Chalcedon followers of any duration know this fact intimately. Worldview Christians fight the good fight on many fronts with confidence in the victory of God's grace. We wage our warfare using sound Biblical doctrine, historically proved. Many contemporary ministries increasingly publish the fullness of the Good News of the Kingdom of God, treating every subject and concern in life. We fight the good fight in the community, engaging in politics in order to save what is left of American Christian liberty. We grow increasingly knowledgeable and ready to speak out, to represent our Lord on any subject. To help ensure the sanctity of our homes, we increasingly avail ourselves of Christian schools and home schooling options. However, one critical arena of Christian action remains largely unreconstructed. Without righteous attention to this critical area, we undermine the work of every other sphere. Alas, many Christians continue to implement the atheistic psychology which has grounded mainstream educational theory for the last century and more. As Dr. Rushdoony has pointed out with respect to the ways of ancient Greece, we often do not realize the impact of that psychology on our worldview. The root of institutionalized sin is the uncorrected sin of the individual. The home is thus the frontline of the Kingdom of God, and it can compromise or “hasten the day” of fulfilled victory according to the promise. For the sake of the Gospel, Biblically sound Christians must learn to reproduce the faith in their children.

Children in Charge?

When I see a well-read Christian embrace and elegantly articulate the historic Biblical doctrines of grace, yet equate his parental duty with mere permissive fawning rather than real training, I am very grieved. Christians who allow themselves to be formed by and respond to mainstream psychology rather than reflective application of Scripture do their Lord and their young neighbor and holy trust a great disservice. The infant willfully extricates himself from his mother's embrace. The child refuses to sleep in his own bed. He does not eat the food his parents provide. He laughs at his mother's polite request. He sets the time, place, and nature of his activity. The child runs the household and parents cater to his whims. When he misbehaves, his mother merely moves him from the place of his misdeed or tantrum to another location, possibly including a “time out.” To the extent these scenarios are true, to this extent sin rules and great effort will be required to undue the damage if possible at all. We thus train our children to become lawless and graceless. No amount of permissiveness and passive affection will efface practiced selfishness. I recall a new mother, regarding her four year old, ejaculating, “Why does he show such contempt for my grace!” The answer is that sin resides deep in the heart of the child. Loving discipline and training correct the heart and ultimately prepare it for the Gospel, as John the Baptist made ready the way of the Lord with his call to repent.

Children who do not learn selflessly, for the sake of Christ, to accept their lot, to be obedient to rightful authority and to persevere by faith, will be the less capable of receiving grace by faith. Children who get everything they wish for, everything their flesh craves, care nothing for saving grace. They see no need, and would rather be miserable in their sinful state than receive real grace. This is a horrible condition, and no one who could help relieve it should leave a child in such misery. Yet this is what a permissive, humanistic love often produces.

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The younger a child is, the more parents and professionals alike prefer an environmental and passive parenting approach. However, by the time a child is four or five years old, a tremendous habit and character has already formed. Training rightfully begins when a child first exerts willfulness against parental wisdom on the child’s behalf. This could be in the infant’s high chair or the changing table. Correction may appear in the form of external restraint or gentle expression of disapproval, but it must be commanding and effective.

Mothers, and especially fathers, must inculcate a godly awe toward the parents, reflecting the awe which every man and women ought to have for their Lord. Such awe and the practice of godly discipline, especially early discipline, allow parents to grant greater and earlier liberty to their children as they grow more capable of self-restraint. Children more readily respond to dad’s authority. Therefore, dad must establish respect for mom.

At the opposite extreme to permissiveness are those parents who understand the need for discipline but who assume an authoritarian view of their parental office. Demanding mere conformance, the parent produces merely external, slavish behavior. The child meanwhile harbors and cultivates his rebellion, waiting only for the size, strength and intellectual power to assert it.

Christians must realize the need for a balanced, time-tempered training, taking nothing for granted in the child’s thought life and conduct. Everything is up for grabs educationally. There is no neutrality between the City of God and the City of Man. Sinfulness is the natural default. To know what the child requires in training, the parent must learn in detail what is required of the mature Christian. Manners are important. Noah Webster defines manners as a synonym for morals and ethics. Parents must become students of godly manners and inculcate the same in the children from the earliest age.

Christian parents no doubt desire to love their children with the best love. The problem may lie in our presuppositions, our training in parenthood, or resolve to execute our parental responsibility. How can we Christians, recognizing God’s tough, usually gentle, and always loving discipline toward us, not understand that our children require the same? Scriptural passages abound from the beginning to end regarding parental responsibility and method. Our children depend upon us to equip and train them in every way of God for their welfare and God’s glory. Parents must take nothing for granted in principle or detail. Parents must *be* the child’s wisdom and discipline for him, requiring something of him until he is capable of walking independently of parental authority before God. Careful teaching produces a natural resistance in the child, because it is work and human nature is lazy. Parent must then also correct a child’s attitude. Parents often make such attitude correction superficially, with the child winning the battle of the wits in the end. This is where Biblical, loving, judicious and self-restrained corporal correction is key. “To whom much is given, much is also required” applies to parental responsibility. True joy and family bonds result from balanced parental discipline and familial love.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ and His kingdom require *Biblical* familial ways.