

The Christian Home (22): Parental Duties (part 5)

Having considered the first two primary duties of parents (instruction and provision), we come this week to begin the third, discipline, and especially the need to establish parental authority.

I. Parental Authority

1. *Parents must establish authority in the home.* That parents have been given authority over children is the clear testimony of Scripture. "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex.20:11). "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph.6:1). "It is certain that, by the will of God, and even by the law of nature, there is an honor and inward reverence of heart due from the child to every parent, be the parent never so poor, never so full of weakness and infirmities" (Hildersham).¹ (1) Parental authority is God-given. It isn't based on the fact that parents are larger or smarter than children. It's God-given. "Our authority exists as long as we are parents to that child because God has ordained it. Our authority rests upon God's authority, not upon the shifting virtues of age, physical prowess, or mental ability. I as a parent must realize that I possess authority only because God has given it to me" (Ray).²

As a parent, you have authority because God calls you to be an authority in your child's life. You have the authority to act on behalf of God. As a parent, you do not exercise rule over your jurisdiction, but over God's. You act at His command. You discharge a duty that He has given. You may not try to shape the lives of your children as pleases you, but as pleases Him.³

Parents, we must remember – we are the ones in charge of the home. We owe no apologies for the exercise of our authority. We are not answerable or accountable to our children, and must never seek their approval for our parenting. As long as we send the message that we need approval we will not succeed in controlling their behavior, they will not gain self-control, and we will not succeed in training them for Christ.⁴

It is no marvel that this honor and reverence is due to our parents; for our parents, by being the means and instruments of our being, are unto us in God's stead and (as His lieutenants) have had His power communicated unto them. And, in this respect, that which the apostle speaks of husbands in 1 Corinthians 11:7, may be said of them: they bear the image and glory of God. In honoring them, we honor God; in despising them we despise the Lord.⁵

(2) Parental authority must be established early. Especially when the child is young, the parents' will, is the will of God for them. That is, the child must submit his will to his parents' will, with the understanding that God commands it. "Not only must I as a parent be aware that my authority exists because God has given it to me, but I must labor to bring my children into constant and immediate contact with the authority of God. Simply put, we must encourage our children to obey because God says so" (Ray).⁶ "The will of a child needs breaking because of the folly that resides in the heart of every fallen human

¹ Arthur Hildersham, *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*, 9

² Bruce Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, 53

³ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 29

⁴ Reb Bradley, *Child Training Tips*, 44

⁵ Arthur Hildersham, *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*, 10

⁶ Bruce Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, 54

being, namely, our active resistance to the light of God's Word and our perverse desire to remain in darkness and ignorance" (Beeke).⁷

Conquering the child's will is not the same thing as crushing the spirit of a child. The goal is not to reduce each child to a puddle of quivering fear and abject passivity, but to bring him to the point of acknowledging that his father and mother are the rulers in the home and he is to stand in awe before his parents, showing them deep respect and submitting to their God-given authority.⁸

Children should be early taught and convinced by Scripture that God has committed them into the hands of their parents; and, consequently, that reverence and obedience to their parents is a part of the duty they owe to God, and disobedience to them is rebellion against Him. And parents should, by no means, indulge their children in a direct and resolute opposition to their will in matters of greater or smaller moment; remembering that a child, left to himself, brings his parents to shame and himself to turn.⁹

A home wherein parental authority (under God) is established, is opposite to a child-run home. "A child-run home is one in which all decisions are made or influenced by the children" (Bradley).¹⁰ Reb Bradley, in a chapter entitled, *Establishing Control in the Home*, said "parents in a child-run home will be heard saying things like: 'I prepare meals in two batches – one for my husband and I, and one cooked a special way for the kids;' 'We can't have that family over to the house, their children are so much younger than ours. Ours would not enjoy them;' 'We could never take our children into the church service. They wouldn't last.'" He then concluded, "Such parents have given up their authority and put their children in charge of their home. They have granted their children veto power and in doing so must follow their children's leadership."¹¹

(3) Parental authority must reflect God's authority over us. Because parental authority comes from God, it must be administered in the name and character of God. "Not only should the child see the authority of God *behind* the authority of the parent, but the child should also see the manner and attitude of God reflected *in* the parent as he administers discipline and correction in His name" (Ray).¹² God's goodness, justice, wisdom, mercy, love, and care should all be identifiable in the parent's authority. "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt.5:48). Parents rule in the name of God. "Now you parents, as you look for honor, carry yourselves worthy of honor. As you look for duty from your children, perform duty to them. Know that another day, even you shall be called to an account before the highest Judge" (Gouge).¹³

Thus, parents must be careful to maintain that authority and pre-eminence that God has given them over their children. "We must take heed we do not lose that honor and reverence that is due to us from our children" (Hildersham).¹⁴ Arthur Hildersham suggested two reasons why parents lose the authority that God has given them over their children.¹⁵ First, "because they do not themselves honor and fear God; therefore, their children cannot honor or fear them"; second, "because they neglected to keep their

⁷ Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 145

⁸ Joel Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises*, 146

⁹ Philip Doddridge, *The Godly Family*, 169

¹⁰ Reb Bradley, *Child Training Tips*, 38

¹¹ Reb Bradley, *Child Training Tips*, 39

¹² Bruce Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, 60

¹³ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:186

¹⁴ Arthur Hildersham, *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*, 9

¹⁵ Arthur Hildersham, *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*, 12-14

children in awe when they were young. 'The fathers of our flesh corrected us, and we gave them reverence' (Heb.12:9). It is as if the apostle had said, 'If they had not corrected us, we would not have revered them so much.'

2. *Parents must not misuse authority in the home.* "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Eph.6:4)," "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col.3:21)." To "provoke" is to "incite, irritate, or exasperate." It means to stir up to anger (wrath), which results in discouragement or becoming disheartened. We must avoid exasperating our children to the point of deep and abiding resentment. "Lest parents should suppose that they might do anything they pleased by the power vested in them over their children, the Apostle warns against an abuse of parental power. *Provocation* is prohibited" (Davenant).¹⁶ "Don't raise your children in such a way that they become utterly frustrated, cast down, bitter, lazy, hostile, pessimistic, fearful, frightened, insecure, resentful, ungodly, and wayward young people" (Mack).¹⁷

(1) Overprotection. "Smother your children, fence them in, never trust them, and always question whether they are really telling you the truth. Never give them an opportunity to develop independence, and they will begin to resent you" (MacArthur).¹⁸

I know many people whose lives have been entirely ruined by selfish, possessive, domineering parents. I know many men and women who have never married for this reason. They were made to feel that they were well-nigh criminals because they even thought of leaving father or mother; their whole life was to be lived for the parents. They were not allowed to have an independent life of their own, or to develop their own personality; a domineering father or mother had crushed out the life and the individuality and the personality of the son or daughter. That is utterly inexcusable, and while it crushes the personality of the child it breeds resentment.¹⁹

(2) Favoritism. "Isaac favored Esau over Jacob, and Rebekah favored Jacob over Esau: what terrible agony that caused! Don't ever compare your children with each other. You can discourage a child, make him angry, and break his spirit by doing that" (MacArthur).²⁰

(3) Neglect. "David neglected Absalom, and Absalom became the greatest heartbreak of David's life. You cannot neglect your children and win. Be there and be available to share their lives with them" (MacArthur).²¹ "Building up a memory bank of happy experiences will engender a good attitude toward you and provide the needed cement in your relationship when you must correct, rebuke, or chastise your children" (Mack).²²

Stir yourself up to be really interested in what interests your children. They can tell when you are actually listening or just pretending. If you do not give them your undivided attention or if you constantly put them off when they want to talk, they will soon not even try to talk to you. In their minds, you are not interested in them anyway. Such a state of affairs is very devastating to your relationship with your children.²³

¹⁶ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:190

¹⁷ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 153

¹⁸ John MacArthur, *The Family*, 101

¹⁹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *An Exposition of Ephesians*, 5:279-280

²⁰ John MacArthur, *The Family*, 101

²¹ John MacArthur, *The Family*, 102

²² Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 155

²³ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 157

(4) Harshness (lack of self-control). "Self-control, control of temper is an essential pre-requisite in the control of others. But that is the trouble, is it not? We see it on the streets, everywhere. We see parents administering chastisement in a rage, often trembling in a temper. They have no self-control, and the result is that the child is exasperated" (MLJ).²⁴

While parents are to command their children and their households after them to keep the way of the Lord, they are not to provoke them to wrath. They are carefully to avoid all unreasonable severity and harshness of treatment, and so to temper their authority with kindness and parental affection as to convince their children that in all the restraints imposed upon them, they have constantly and deeply at heart their highest good. They should aim and endeavor, as far as possible, to secure the affections of their children, so that they may delight in conforming to their requirements.²⁵

(5) Uniformity. By this is meant, dealing with children identically, regardless of their age and maturity level.

We must never fail to recognize growth and development in the child. There are some parents who continue to regard their children all their lives as if they had never outgrown their childhood. The children may be twenty-five but they still treat them as if they were five. They do not recognize that this person, this individual, this child whom God has given them in His grace, is one that is growing and developing and maturing. They do not recognize that the child's personality is blossoming forth, that knowledge is being gained, that experience is being widened, and that the child is developing even as they themselves have done.²⁶

(6) Hypocrisy. "We must practice what we preach. We must avoid double standards. Children are quick to spot insincerity and hypocrisy. They resent it deeply" (Mack).²⁷ "

(7) Discouragement. "You can provoke a child to anger by discouraging him, always withholding your approval and only telling him what is wrong with him. A child responds to approval and encouragement just as you do" (MacArthur).²⁸

(8) Lack of clear expectations. "Not knowing what their parents expect of them can be an alarming, frustrating experience for children. Children are not mind readers. Limits and expectations must be clearly delineated. Their presence provides security and structure. Their absence encourages insecurity, frustration, hostility, and resentment" (Mack).²⁹

(9) Lack of unity among parents. Parents provoke their children to wrath if they contradict each other. The mother says one thing and the father another.

(10) Lack of consistent discipline. Parents must be consistent and uniform in their expectations and discipline. They must not forbid one thing today, and allow it tomorrow. They must be constant and unswerving.

²⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *An Exposition of Ephesians*, 5:279

²⁵ Samuel Worcester, *The Godly Family*, 85

²⁶ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *An Exposition of Ephesians*, 5:284

²⁷ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 154

²⁸ John MacArthur, *The Family*, 101-102

²⁹ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 156-157