

8. The Biblical Foundation for Growth in Godly Character

In our last two topics, we saw that Moses was given five priorities for spiritual leadership. Our last two topics have covered the first two of those priorities. As we provide spiritual leadership to our children, we have seen that we are to pray for our children and we are to help them grow in their knowledge of the Word of God. Today, we will see that our third priority as we lead both our physical and our spiritual children is to help them grow in godly character. Exodus 18:20 says, “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.” Notice that this verse says that we are to show them the way to walk.

There is a great difference between showing our children how to walk and telling our children what to do. That difference must be clearly understood if we are going to carry out our God given priority to show our children how to walk. Paul defined this difference very clearly in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 where we read, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” These verses give us seven key principles to help us understand how to help our children develop godly character.

First, we see that a godly parent makes a clear distinction between shaming a child and warning a child. Paul made it clear that he did not want to put the Corinthians to shame. Instead, he wanted to warn them. When we put a child to shame, we cause them to turn in upon themselves. Such shame produces humiliation and dishonor. In contrast, a warning points out the fact that something is sinful and needs to be corrected. It also provides the opportunity to show a child how to correct the thing that the child has done wrong. There is a great difference between telling a child, “You are a bad child,” and telling a child that the thing that they have done is sin and they need to ask Christ for forgiveness. The first statement says that a child is bad or defective. The second reminds the child that he or she has committed a sin and needs to ask Christ for forgiveness.

Second, we see that a godly parent makes a clear distinction between an instructor and a father. The word that is translated “instructor” was used by Homer in his book *The Odyssey* to introduce Mentor, a slave who was given the responsibility for raising a son. The Greeks felt that the work of raising a child was not the work of a parent but just the work of a slave. The instructor usually focused on severe discipline to prepare the boy for manhood. In contrast, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, Paul makes it very clear that a godly parent shows the love of a nursing mother and the example of a godly father. To help our children develop godly character we must show genuine love and a godly example to follow instead of just punishing them with severe discipline.

Third, we see that Paul says that in Christ Jesus he had begotten them through the Gospel. In addition to speaking of a physical child, the Jews used the word “begotten” to speak of “*bringing a person to his way of life or converting a person*”. Here, we see a godly parent helps a child

Growing Godly Family Series – Developing the Biblical Foundation for a Godly Marriage 8. “The Biblical Foundation for Growth in Godly Character”

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develop a godly lifestyle by showing the child a way of life which models the transformation that the Gospel makes in the life of a person as that person is learning to follow the example of Christ. A child that consistently sees a life with a critical and judgmental spirit will develop a critical and judgmental spirit. A child that sees the love and compassion of Christ consistently modeled by a parent will be drawn to Christ and will learn to live a life of love and compassion.

Fourth, we see that a godly parent invites his children to imitate his example. We see in 1 Corinthians 11:1 that Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” Here, we see that Paul did more than just tell spiritual children to imitate him. He also pointed out the fact that he was imitating Christ and following the example of Christ. In order to imitate and follow the example of Christ, we must get to know Christ and not just know about Him. 1 John 1:3 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” We can know about Christ by reading the Bible. However, we will really only “know” Christ as we learn to enjoy daily fellowship with Him. This means learning to share our lives with Christ and living in His power instead of our own strength.

Fifth, we see that a godly parent helps children become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry. Paul said that he was sending Timothy, his faithful and beloved son in the Lord. At the same time, Paul also makes it very clear that Timothy has become a full partner in ministry and that they ministered as a team. 1 Thessalonians 1:1 begins, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Although Timothy had been a spiritual son to Paul, Paul helped the church at Thessalonica to recognize that he was now a full partner in ministry.

In doing this, Paul was following the example of Christ. In John 15:15, Christ said, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Then, Christ told Mary in John 20:17, “...go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’” Here, we see that Christ elevated His disciples from servants to friends and brethren. Just a few verses later, Christ helped the disciples to understand what it meant to be friends and brethren. John 20:21 says, “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” Christ said He was sending them the same way that the Father sent Him.

In Galatians 4:1-2, Paul said, “Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” Here, we see that a father normally had a set time when he changed the status of his son from the status of a servant to the status of being master of all (a full partner with his father). One of the greatest problems in many cultures is the fact that many parents never allow their children to become “adult sons and daughters” but try to keep them in the role of servants under their authority.

People who are pressured to be under the authority of another person will often obey. However, godly adult sons and daughters will do much more. They will honor their parents because of respect when the parents change the status of their children to “adult sons and daughters” who are treated as partners and friends. This will produce a mutual respect because the parents will honor and respect their children as adults and accept counsel from their children just as their children accept counsel from them. Both the parents and children will then be able to put the words of Galatians 5:13 into practice when it says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Godly adult children have a unique relationship with godly parents. Both children and parents are able to enjoy true liberty and both are able to serve one another with mutual love and respect. This helps each adult child to reach their full potential in Christ.

Sixth, we see that a godly parent focuses on his ways. The word that is translated “ways” is used 102 times in the New Testament. It is used to speak of the way or the road that a traveler travels. It is also used to speak of a course of conduct including the way that a person thinks, feels and decides. Paul knew what Timothy would teach the Corinthians because he had observed the character and teaching of Timothy. He had listened to Timothy and knew how he thought. He had walked together with Timothy and understood the feelings of Timothy. He had observed how Timothy made decisions in his life. As a result, Paul knew that Timothy would model godly character for the Corinthians because that was what Timothy had done through the years as Paul and Timothy served the Lord together.

Seventh, a godly parent gives a consistent example that is the same in every situation. As we read in 1 Corinthians 4:17, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” We see that Paul had provided an example for Timothy. Paul said that Timothy had observed that his life and godly character were a consistent pattern of life. He did not change in his character as he went to different cities. He did not do one thing in one church and a different thing in the next church. His ways in Christ were the same, whether other people were watching or not. Timothy had seen this consistency in the life of Paul and so was able to remind the people in Corinth of the way that Paul had lived as he ministered among the Corinthians.

As we see from these seven principles, godly character is caught rather than just being taught. Godly character will develop in the lives of our children as they see it modeled in our lives. True ministry to our children is the result of what we are when no one is watching except our children. They see how we relate to one another as a family and they imitate what they have seen. May the Lord richly bless you as you model godly character for both your physical and your spiritual children.