

Teaching Our Children

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Introduction.

- A. Safety seems to be a preoccupation of our country today. We want to make everything safe for everyone, but especially our children. Everything from Tylenol to dish soap comes in child-proof bottles that are sometimes so stubborn as to be adult-proof too. Our children have to wear helmets every time they get on a bike or a skateboard. When they ride in a car with us, they have to be in either a car seat or a booster seat until they're almost teenagers. When they go to school, there are metal detectors and security guards to shut bad things out, and there are elaborate recognition systems during after-school pick-up to keep sexual predators at bay. It seems like our legislatures have passed every law they can think of to keep our children safe.
- B. Sadly, this overpowering concern for the physical safety of our children is not matched by an equal concern for their spiritual safety. Even while we pass law after law to protect our children's lives, the corruption of the world around us poses an ever-increasing danger to their souls. Every day, the children of this nation are being lured to pursue things that will lead to them being eternally lost. Sadly, this just as true of children raised by Christian parents. How many children and young people have we known who spent the first eighteen years of their lives coming to church, but haven't been seen in the assembly since?
- C. Brethren, our children are the lifeblood of the church, and we're losing them. We need to stop the bleeding. We need to dedicate ourselves to doing everything we can to save our children's souls. Interestingly enough, one of the most comprehensive plans we have for accomplishing this great work is found not in the New Testament, but in the Old. It elaborates on what the law of Christ already says. This morning, let's focus on the first five books of the Old Testament, to see what they have to teach us about teaching our children.

I. Teaching an Inheritance.

- A. The first thing that Moses has to say to us about teaching our children is that we need to change the way we look at God's law. We need to recognize that when we teach our children, we are actually giving them the most valuable part of their inheritance from us. Since the beginning of time, people have devoted a great deal of effort to ensuring that their children receive their valuables after they die, and modern Americans feel the same way. In law school, I spent a semester-long class learning how to write wills so that the testator's kids get the money and Uncle Sam doesn't, and it's safe to say that all of us want that.
- B. Friends, all of us need to learn to guard our children's spiritual inheritance with the same care. Look at what Moses says in Deuteronomy 29:29. The word of God is worth more than the entire world and everything on it, and yet God has given it to us for free. This priceless treasure belongs to us and to our children forever, and we need to make sure that their inheritance is not stolen or lost. We don't do this by writing a will or putting our Bible in a bank someplace; instead, we do it by teaching our children the word from the time they are old enough to understand it. It's not the preacher's responsibility to instruct our kids in God's truth. It's not the Bible-class teacher's responsibility. It's the parent's responsibility. We have been entrusted with the oracles of God, and it's up to us to pass them on to our children.

II. What, How, and Why.

- A. This idea, that parents are responsible for teaching their children about God's law, is an idea that Moses restates over and over again in Deuteronomy. However, this isn't just mindless repetition on Moses' part. Instead, he tells us what we should teach, how we should teach it, and why we should teach it.
- B. We see the "what" part of all of this in Deuteronomy 4:9-10. I don't think I've ever heard this passage used in a sermon before, but it's a really neat verse. First of all, it tells us that sharing God's law with children isn't just the responsibility of parents. It's also the responsibility of grandparents. Now, this runs somewhat counter to our cultural conception of what it means to be a grandparent. In modern America, at least, we tend to think that grandparents are there to take care of the kid when Mom has to work or run errands, and to spoil the kid rotten in the process. In reality, the godly grandparent has the same sort of obligation as the godly parent. Grandma and Grandpa have the same treasures of knowledge from the Lord that Mom and Dad do, and they need to make sure that their grandchildren as well as their children will inherit it.
- C. The way 4:10 is phrased is also quite interesting, and we need to spend some time looking at it. Moses especially wants the Israelites to teach their children about what God said to them at Mount Sinai and the circumstances in which He said it. This context continues to describe the awe-inspiring sights and sounds that accompanied the receipt of the Law from God. Now, the purpose of this is fairly obvious. Moses wants the Israelites to teach such things so that their kids will look at the Law as more than just some random book. Instead, they'll see it as what it really is, the voice of a God who is both glorious and terrifying, speaking to them. A book can be ignored. An omnipotent God must be obeyed.

- D. This is a point that we need to drive home too. We need to emphasize that when we say the Bible is the word of God, it really IS the word of God. It is the Creator speaking to us, and disobedience is not an option. If our children understand the Bible in this light, they will be far more receptive to its message.
- E. But how do we get this point across? Moses explains in Deuteronomy 11:18-20. What Moses says here can really be boiled down to two main ideas: laying up and pouring out. We must diligently store up the word in our hearts and in our souls, and then we must talk about it constantly, because that's what we do with the things we genuinely love. My football team, the University of Missouri Tigers, are doing pretty well this year, and I've been really excited about it. So what do I do? I watch or listen to all the games, I read all the newspaper articles about them, and then, whenever I'm around someone who's interested in college football, I talk about them at massive length. I lay up, and then I pour out. The passion we have for God's word must be at least as strong as my passion for the Tigers. Once we develop that passion, it will be easy for us to teach our children as we should, because that's what we will have in our hearts.
- F. Then, we see the reason why we need to teach our children in Deuteronomy 32:46-47. We need to set our hearts on God's word and teach it not because it's fun, not because it's a hobby, but because it is life for us and our children. Will any mother and father fail to rescue their children from death, even if it means risking or even losing their own lives? Brethren, we must view our children's souls with the same amount of urgency; indeed, with even more urgency. There may well be hope for our children who die in the flesh, but there is no hope for the child who never makes his peace with God. We may have to change our lives drastically to teach our children as we need to. We may have to make sacrifices, but so what? It's worth it.

III. Teachable Moments.

- A. Not only, though, does Moses tell us where we need to go; he gives us some advice on how we can accomplish it. He tells us to look for teachable moments. Consider what Moses says about the Passover in Exodus 12:25-27. The Israelites were supposed to celebrate the Passover once a year, and it would be only natural for their children to ask what they were doing with the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the blood. Whenever that happened, the Israelites were supposed to explain what God did to rescue them from Egypt.
- B. We can do the same with all of the commandments of God we follow today. We need to be ready to explain to our children why we do the things we do: why we come to church on Sunday, why we sing, why we pray, why we partake of the Lord's Supper, why we study the Bible, why we give to the Lord's work, and everything else besides. Best of all, it gives us the opportunity to explain how all of these things serve and glorify God.
- C. However, not all teachable moments come in the context of worship. Slightly later, when God divided the Jordan so the Israelites could cross, He commanded them to take 12 rocks from the dry ground in the middle and leave them on the far bank. We see the reason why in Joshua 4:6-7. That pile of rocks was left there so that whenever any Israelites were traveling by with their children, the children would ask about it, and the parents would explain the mighty work that God had done for them. What this tells us is that essentially anything can be an opportunity for us to bring God into the lives of our children. A beautiful sunset, a majestic mountain range, or even a flower can give us the chance to tell our kids about the glory of their Creator. God is everywhere, and we need to learn to teach our kids to see Him.

IV. Failure.

- A. Now, all of this sounds great in theory, but if we don't practice it, our hopes of raising godly children likely will end in failure. Sadly, this is what happened in the case of the Israelites. Consider the testimony of Judges 2:7, 10-11. The Israelites were faithful and obedient as long as the men who had seen the works of God for themselves were still alive, but once those men died, the memory of what God had done was lost. Within 100 years of the time when God had brought them to the promised land, they began to serve the Baals.
- B. Friends, the same thing can happen to us if we're not careful. There are no guarantees that our children will be faithful even if we do everything we should, but there is little hope at all for them if we do not. We can do all kinds of wonderful things for God, but it still doesn't matter. After all, the men of Joshua's generation conquered a whole country in His name, but they failed to teach their children, and their children were lost.

V. Three Questions.

- A. Along these lines, let's give ourselves a quick spiritual checkup. Let's ask ourselves three questions about what we're teaching our children (and grandchildren too).
 1. **Does my attendance at worship show my children that God is important?**
 2. **Does my behavior at home teach my children godliness?**
 3. **Does my life reveal to my children a heart that loves God?**
- B. Now, these aren't really yes or no questions, even though they look like it. Almost all of us will answer "Yes" in some areas of our lives; almost all of us will answer "No" in some other areas. The point is, let's evaluate ourselves and see how we need to improve so that all of us can best accomplish this vital task.

Conclusion. If you've been failing in this or in any other area of your service to God, come to Him now.