

The power then, that parents have over their children arises from that duty which is incumbent on them--to take care of their offspring during the imperfect state of childhood, to inform the mind and govern the actions of their yet ignorant nonage till reason shall take its place.

John Locke

## Principle Six

### CHILDREN ARE ENDOWED WITH THE GIFT OF REASON

Freedom and independence are based upon the child's ability to make correct decisions, and this ability is in turn based upon having knowledge and understanding to do so. According to Dr. Neil Flinders, professor of educational psychology, children go through three stages of moral growth: the model stage, the rule stage, and the reason stage.

#### **The Model Stage**

Since the ability to reason is not developed before the age of eight, children respond well to short, consistent commands. At this stage they model the behavior of their parents; therefore, instead of telling a little one to pick up the toys, it is better to say, Let's pick up the toys before dinner.

Real conflict occurs when the parent tells the child to do something and then seemingly does not expect obedience. The young child quickly learns that, Mommy doesn't really mean what she says. These are the choice years for the parent--the child is teachable, submissive, and usually willing to accept authoritative rule. It is an ideal time to instill faith and share stories of courage and

honor. It is a time for freedom with few expectations by the parents, but consistent discipline and follow-through.

Young children, with little reasoning power, do not need or expect elaborate explanations of why they are to obey a specific command; in fact, they can become very confused by long orations on why they should not jump on the bed. They accept simple, short commands.

### **The Rule Stage**

The second stage of moral development usually occurs between the ages of eight and eleven. This is called the rule stage because children at this age like charts, lists and exact rules. They have a difficult time comprehending the occasional need for a variance, exception, or any other condition that may alter the grand and almighty rule. Often, when a parent wishes to make an exception to the rule, the child will say, "You can't do that--it's a rule." The parent may counter, "But I made the rule!" However, for children at this stage of development the rules of life dethrone even the maker of the rules.

They are often heard saying such things as, "The playground rules say that you can't play on my side of the yard. . .It's the rule that you can't stand up until the recess bell rings. . .I don't care if she's sick; it's not my dish night. . .You know it's not a T.V. night, Dad, what are you doing watching the news?"

### **The Reason Stage**

The third stage of moral growth occurs around the age of twelve and extends to adulthood. It is called the reason stage because now the child wants to know how, why, what, where, and what for. He asks, why? Why are you telling me to do this? Who says it's wrong? Why is it wrong? Why do I have to?" He questions authority and the established rules of the game.

Dr. Flinders writes,

The young child wanted to know, “Who tells me to do it?” The eight-to-twelve-year-old wants to know “What are the rules?” The twelve-year-old-to-adult wants to know, “Why should I do it?” He begins searching for meanings. He wants experience, discussions, and abstract thoughts.

Sometimes his search for meaning becomes questions, “Why shouldn’t I do it?” straining relationships with adults to test the perimeters of his freedom, rebelling against what he interprets as injustice or hypocrisy. He is not just posing intellectual questions: he is exploring spiritual questions, as a child of God whose moral awareness is expanding.

The adolescent’s vision of authority differs from the young child’s. The four-year-old accepts authority. The eight-year-old accepts hard and cold rules. The adolescent accepts neither authority nor rules, but demands clear reasoning. He is capable of perceiving the principles and governing himself by those principles. The key issue is, “Why?” He wants to hear the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts.

It is vital that the parent understand that the teenager’s honest--and sometimes not-so-honest--inquiry is the training ground for becoming independent and self-governing. He has a right to know why--and if he is convinced and converted in time he will likely state the case better than the parent. In the midst of peer pressure and society’s squeeze to mold a convert to the new morality order, the youth expect and need more than the argument, “Because it’s a commandment. . . Because I said so. . . Because you should, that’s why. . . I’m tired of all your questions.” After all, they have to justify their lifestyle to themselves, then to their friends; and, somehow, “My parents said so” fails to satisfy.

## **The Gift of Reason**

Parents and teachers who have not acquired the ability to reason and to teach convincingly with clear logic will find themselves lost and threatened by the budding of curiosity. It is important to remember

that the existence of God and the presence of universal moral laws are open to discussion. God intended it to be so, in order to protect our right of free will; therefore, it is only through honesty and open inquiry that we or our children can come to know God.

This is a crucial message for parents and leaders of youth who dare enter the treacherous and often terrifying terrain of the teenagers--to be armed well with the qualities of knowledge, truth, and doctrine; understanding, wisdom, and spiritual insight; and power, authority, and direction from God.

\_\_\_\_Why do we parents become discouraged with children who doubt the faith? It is through doubt and the desire to discover that truth is found. To inhibit intellectual honesty and inquiry is to inhibit thinking; to inhibit thinking is to promote death. The choice to think or not to think is the choice to be conscious or to be unconscious. It is man's reason that gives him the ability to survive in the world--while the animals follow only instinct. Using reason, mankind figures out how to maintain, protect, and better himself; and yet, there are those who run away from this gift in fear that it may lead them astray, and as a result they run away from their ability to be rational and to exercise free agency and conscience. Reasoning is a part of free will and a part of conscience. With the power to reason, man is able to exercise his agency. With the power to reason, man is free either to yield to or to deny the promptings of the guiding conscience. It is through the rational mind that man draws upon the divinity within himself.

Reason is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses. It is a faculty that man has to exercise by choice. Thinking is not an automatic function. In any hour and issue of his life, a man is free to think or to evade that effort. Thinking requires a state of full focused awareness. The act of focusing one's consciousness is volitional. Man can focus his mind to a full, active, purposefully directed awareness of reality--or he can unfocus it and let himself drift in a semiconscious daze, merely reacting to any chance stimulus of the immediate moment, at the mercy of his undirected sensory-perceptual

mechanism and of any random, associational connections it might happen to make. . . .Man is free to choose not to be conscious, but not free to escape the penalty of unconsciousness: destruction. Man is the only living species that has the power to act as his own destroyer. (Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, pp. 20-21)

## **Surrendering the Powers of Reason**

We are free to be conscious or unconscious--to think or not to think--to choose or to allow the thinkers around us to choose for us. Throughout history we see the fate of those who relinquished their right to reason and turned it over to those who were more able, or more capable, or more successful. One generation of Germans allowed Adolf Hitler to do their thinking for them; moral consciousness was dulled, reason was suppressed, the powers of darkness prevailed--and millions died.

Why do people run from consciousness? There are those who fear freedom and choice and so allow others to make the decisions. In *The Brothers Karamasov*, Dostoevski states that man has "no more pressing need than the one to find somebody to whom he can surrender, as quickly as possible, that gift of freedom which he, the unfortunate creature, was born with." Others turn themselves--their reasoning--over to an organization with the hope that the security of the pack will save them the agony of choice. "Now, tell me again--what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to live? In fact, where am I supposed to live?" There are those who turn their identity over to loved ones. "He doesn't want me to. . . .I'll have to ask my. . . ." Love or devotion to a person or a cause which demands sacrifice of the powers of reason, choice, and independent thinking leads to annihilation. Love does not mean giving oneself away to another, but sharing oneself with another. It consists not in losing sight of oneself for another but in discovering oneself with another.

Eric Fromm, in his book *Escape From Freedom*, writes,

An attitude of complete self-denial for the sake of another person and the surrender of one's own rights and claims to another person have been praised as examples of great love. . . . Actually, in these cases, love is essentially a masochistic yearning. . . . [True] love is based on equality and freedom. If it is based on subordination and loss of integrity of one partner, it is masochistic dependence, regardless of how the relationship is rationalized. . . . To rule over another person, if one can claim that to rule him is for that person's own sake, frequently appears as an expression of love, but the essential factor is the enjoyment of domination.

In this same work, he uses a description from the novel *Lost Illusions* to describe an unhealthy dominating relationship. Citing Abbe,

. . . I have given life to you, and you belong to me. . . . With powerful hands I will keep you straight on the road to power; I promise you, nevertheless, a life of pleasures, of honors, of everlasting feasts. You will never lack money, you will sparkle, you will be brilliant. . . . I . . . shall secure the brilliant edifice of your success. I love power for the sake of power! . . . I will love my creature. I will mold him; will shape him to my services, in order to love him as a father loves a child. . . . His success is my product. He is silent and talks with my voice; he follows my advice in everything. (p. 160)

If in our attempts to hold our children to the faith we block intellectual inquiry and freedom of conscience, we block the road to true faith, for faith in God and his way of life is the result of a serious search of the mind and spirit. The search begins when in honesty one realizes, I don't know. I'll have to find out for myself. If we as parents in essence cry out, "Oh, no! I thought you were a child of faith! I thought you had a testimony! I thought you knew the gospel was

true,” we clamp down the very stirrings of investigation upon which a true testimony is based.

The sins of the parents are literally imposed upon the children when the child abandons the search for truth for the security of blind acceptance and follows in the tradition out of pretense. The idea that only the doubting Thomases need verification is false; the idea that only the rebellious souls seek for sure understanding is false; the idea that honest inquiry and debate are adversarial is false; the idea that intellectual wrestlings threaten childlike faith is false; the idea that pure faith is offended by the challenge of curiosity is false.

Without pure knowledge--a sure testimony for ourselves--we are likely to fall into the traps of hypocrisy and guile. Hypocrisy means representing oneself or one's beliefs falsely; guile means deceit. When we do not know, we pretend. When we pretend, we fear those who in the spirit of investigation want a closer look. The family diseases of hypocrisy and guile are highly contagious. They dam intellectual freedom and foster apathy, fear, and dishonesty--individually and collectively.

Teaching through example is good and proper, but it may not be enough. The objective is not conversion to a lifestyle but conversion to eternal life--or more specifically, a life worth living eternally, an abundant life of the heart, might, mind and spirit. In order to help bring about such a conversion, parents have the obligation and responsibility to question and to find out the truth for themselves and then to allow and encourage their children to do the same.

## **Summary**

Clearly, the graduate school of parenting requires that we ourselves be prepared with more than an authoritative stance. It requires that we represent the case well, by word as well as example--and, most important, that we be open to questions and confrontations. After all, how can we expect our children to have--as if by magic--the spiritual insights that we have spent years acquiring through study and faith?

## Principle in Practice

One of our sons went through an extremely difficult situation emotionally, and spiritually. Caught in the vise of internal conflict, his usual outgoing and sensitive personality deteriorated into one that was harsh, insensitive, and insecure. In fear, we watched him spiral down into the blackness of despair. He tried to run away from himself, and his family. He did not want anyone around except friends. It was as if he enclosed himself with an insulating, protective shield of indifference to say, "I know that I have hurt you, and I will probably hurt you again; so just stay away." One day I climbed a nearby mountain to pour out my heart of anguish to my God. I prayed for comfort; I prayed for understanding. I prayed that what was happening would not happen. Oh, how I loved this son! After several hours, without receiving any comfort and exhausted, I fell asleep and began to dream; I saw a clearing in a forest with a target on a pine tree. Directly opposite the tree was a group of fine young men. I could tell by their dress and their demeanor. One by one they lifted a bow and arrow and shot at the target. Some made it; some missed. Then I saw this son dressed in jeans come from the side, through a group of bushes, with bow and arrow in his arms. He stopped, took aim, and fired directly into the bull's eye. I woke with an impression upon me; that he could come from a different direction, and still make the bull's eye!

After many months of prayer, I decided upon a course of action. I would not allow him to shut me out. Of course, I was offended by his riotous living, but I knew the son that I had raised, and this was not my son. I visited his apartment frequently with vegetables from the garden, cards or flowers. I invited him to go to dinner once a week. He said that he would, but informed me, "I don't want to talk church, or God. I don't know what I believe anymore, but I won't talk about church." I agreed.

At first he was tense--thinking that I would preach to him-- then he relaxed realizing that there was so much we could talk about without talking church. We talked music groups, cars, inventions,

friends, family--anything that he would talk about. Gradually, after several weeks, he began to talk about life and its meaning. I listened. He was searching for answers, so I provided books of insight and understanding, but unconnected with church doctrine or faith. He read them and asked for more.

He began to come home again; we reasoned together into the wee hours of the morning. When he was open and questioning, I put everything aside to discuss. We spent hours going through ideas such as Ayn Rand's concept of individualism, Drummond's ideas, and the concepts in Richard Bach's novel *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. He would reply over and over, "I can see that. I didn't understand that before. That makes sense." Each new idea became a foothold for him to climb up out of the darkness; his personality began to emerge--warm, sensitive, curious, and humble. But it was a slow, step-by-step conversion to truth. I have often wondered what would have happened to him if I had closed the door on this five-year discovery process, or if I had listened to those who seemed to want to wake me to the reality of his true nature. In time, he became a voracious reader in the quest to discover truth. As his mind became enlightened so also did his spirit, his confidence, and his ability to relate to others.

Last year, while we all sat around the table after the Thanksgiving feast, he said, openly and unashamed "I've come to realize why it's important to have the strength of the Savior in my life. I know that I cannot make it without him."