

“...the means ought to be proportioned to the end; the persons from whose agency the attainment of any end is expected ought to possess the means by which it is to be attained.”

Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Papers, p. 153

Principle Seven

PARENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO GOVERN IN THEIR HOMES ACCORDING TO JUST AND HOLY PRINCIPLES

Recently, a woman confided, “I don’t know what to do. I want our daughter to call when she’ll be late, but my husband thinks that I have no right to expect her to do this.”

As I listened I realized that she believed that a parent had the right to set rules, and expect compliance, but her husband believed otherwise. He said, “The way I see it, a twenty year old should not have to answer to her parents anymore. Just because we’re the parents doesn’t mean that our opinions are any more valuable than hers. So why should she do as we say? Children have their own ideas.”

This represents the confusion and insecurity that many parents experience as they attempt to govern in their homes. We live in a society in which very often parents fear their own children, and

instead of giving guidance and direction, they take guidance and direction from their children. We all hear, "How do I get my children to mind me? They don't listen to a word I say. . . . That Little Johnny-- he's the boss of the family."

Sixty years ago, things were different. My father recalls the time when children were to be seen but not heard. On one occasion, he said to his father "You're name is Harry just like mine," realizing for the first time that he and his father had the same name. This casual remark was met by a not-so-casual rebuke, "Don't ever call me Harry again!" The comment was perceived as impudence.

That was yesterday; it was a time when children, Blacks, and women knew their place. They were to be submissive, lowly; they were to take at face value the unwritten law that parents, whites, and men rule! Gradually, things began to change; repression of the soul is only temporary. Men, women, and children sense within themselves that they are born with unalienable rights to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. The women's movement, the civil rights movement and reformation of the child labor laws were the outcome of this inner sense of liberty. All of this has been well, good and proper. However, when in the name of repression one group begins to persecute and deprive another group of their rights, the balance for justice has swung too far.

The state has the right to provide free abortions for the youth without the consent of the parents; and yet, if the abortion involves medical complications the parents would be held responsible for that care. A woman has the right to abortions on demand, but in the process men have lost their reproductive rights; the father cannot protect his child--however loved, however wanted--from abortion. We hear of teenagers who run away from home and disregard the authority of parents, and yet, the parents can be held liable for the destructive behavior of the child.

Yesterday, it was clear and simple--parents had the right and the authority to rule and reign in the home. Today, with the flurry of disputed rights, parents find themselves floundering around, wondering to themselves, "Do I have any rights over my children?"

The voices answer, “No, you do not have the right to impose upon your children your religious preference, your moral values, or your particular lifestyle.” In some schools the children are taught multiple sexual lifestyles so that they can decide for themselves whether to become heterosexual or homosexual. “It is only fair that they have a right to choose for themselves,” the psychologists insist. And when the parents complain, “But that’s against our beliefs,” the psychologists answer, “There is no sin; there is only repressive desires that have manifested themselves in socially unacceptable behaviors brought on by parental practices resulting in excessive guilt and mental stress. . . . Now, tell me again; let me see if I understand you; you say that your parents potty-trained you in the now-discredited method of Dr. Schmuck; no, that could have some strong bearing on the malfunction of your nervous system.” The voices sound so convincing, after all, they have the education; they have the degrees; they have the positions in high places! But in the aftermath of it all, parents, wide-eyed, with knees knocking, tremble in fear of the responsibility.

The Challenges To Parent’s Divine Right

States Rights Versus Parental Rights

As was discussed previously, we live in a society embroiled in a philosophical civil war--a war of ideas regarding the nature of man, the source of ethics, and the proper role of government. The lines seem to be clear and defined. Usually those of the faithless mind stand for strong government, assuming it to be mankind’s savior from poverty, alienation, loneliness, ignorance, and other social ills. They have turned away from God and toward one another, embracing the humanistic philosophy that says, “there is no God, no help from above, and no set of rules to the game of life.” On the opposing side

are those who realize that the hope of mankind rests not in government but in the guidance of a loving Heavenly Father. Unfortunately for our children, one of the main battlefields of this ideological conflict is the public school system, especially where those of the secular mind want the children taught one way and those with a religious perspective insist upon another.

Last spring a woman called to ask my opinion regarding her conflict with the local authorities. She was uneducated, insecure and of Indian extraction. She said that her fourteen-year-old daughter had been harassed on several occasions by two fellow students who wanted her to take drugs. When she had refused, they threatened to beat her up. Several times she had escaped their plan by running into a neighbor's home. Finally, the family decided that it was unsafe for the girl to attend school. The mother explained the situation to the principal, but in spite of this a few days later the district attorney came to her home to inform the mother that she would be arrested if she did not insist that their daughter attend school. The distraught parents scrambled to find another school--or even a private school--for their daughter to attend, but all were filled. She sobbed, "What are we going to do? They said that they would give us two weeks, but there won't be any openings in the private schools till next year. What should we do? I don't want our daughter to be beat up by those kids."

I suggested the possibility of independent study--usually offered in California secondary schools--or home school with tutors. Neither the school nor the district attorney had informed her of these alternatives.

I recall another incident that occurred several years ago while I was serving on a committee to develop a conservative family-life education curriculum in our local schools. The debates dragged on for months. On one side were those who wanted a liberal family-life curriculum that taught about various sexual lifestyles--including homosexuality--and emphasized pregnancy prevention through the use of contraceptives. On the other side, were those who wanted the curriculum to focus on pregnancy prevention through abstinence, and

biological information, with only the heterosexual lifestyle taught. At one point, a school board member became exasperated with the parent's wishes, and blurted out, "No matter what the parents have to say, we've still got to do what is best for the kids!"

I am sure that she regretted the remark, but it stands as representative of the view prominently held that the school and state authorities know better than parents what is right for children. Parents who face this attitude over and over may unwittingly, begin to relinquish their position as head of the family to the professionals.

A few years later, while revising a family-life curriculum for the state of California, I heard the most blatant assertion undermining the authority of parents. One student project, for thirteen-year-olds, was to list their code of ethics regarding sexual behavior. They were instructed not to depend upon traditional or parental views, but to think for themselves. However, they were given a noted psychologist's code of ethics. This psychologist approved of premarital sex, and extramarital sex but disapproved of sexual relationships with children, the mentally deficient, or the aged. In other words, the students were told that while they could not reflect their family values they could refer to the psychologist's immoral outlook!

Throughout my studies of curriculum guides used in California, I found these subtle--sometimes not so subtle--comments undermining the authority of the parents. Some writers have suggested that the attitude of the educational system has contributed to the generation gap and, consequently, the lack of respect given to parents by adolescents. In any case, I am convinced that disrespect for parents--by both their children and the professionals--has contributed greatly to the problem of impotent, guilt-ridden, and insecure parents.

Philosophies of Men Conflict with Parents Right To Govern

In addition to the battle between parent's and state's rights, the confidence of parents has been threatened by other so-called experts who say: "You wouldn't want to damage the tender, fragile egos of your children. . . .If you make demands on them, they will do the

opposite. . . . You must not suppress the innate freedom in the child by imposing rules and regulations. Who's to say that your values are right? . . .Repressed anger creates hostile feelings--don't make your child angry."

Gregory Bodenhamer, in his book, *Back In Control*, says:

As a result of their inability to get unmotivated children to change their ways, many mental health counselors began urging parents to be democratic, to compromise or negotiate their rules away. And when that wasn't successful (when parents were still angry and resentful because of their children's behavior), they urged parents to allow children to have the freedom to fail, to learn from the natural consequences of their misbehavior.

Children who are raised in democratic households, however, or in homes where there are few, if any, mandatory rules, sometimes have a difficult time adjusting to the firmer rules at school or on the job. They are frequently in trouble with their teachers or their bosses, and since they haven't been raised to obey other people's rules, they tend to blame others for their problems. The rules they do accept, have for the most part, come to them the hard way. They learn that fire is dangerous by repeatedly being burned; or that stealing isn't worth the cost after they are repeatedly booked into Juvenile Hall; or with ten or twenty years of reflection, that dropping out of high school was a stupid thing to do. After being allowed to fail at the important tasks of life--in the hope that they would learn from their failures--they have learned at least one thing: how to fail. Even worse, they see themselves as failures and act accordingly. . . .The greatest failure of the present state of affairs is that many children's counselors think parents don't have the ability, on their own, to change the

children's behavior. . .A child's misbehavior is simply an exercise of power--doing what he or she wants to do in the absence of active parental authority. (p.xii)

Bodenhammers book is one of many books that have addressed the problem of the experts robbing parents of their right to rule in their homes; *Dare to Discipline* is another. In this book, James Dobson writes,

The advocates of this laissez-faire philosophy would recommend that a child be allowed to fail in school if he chooses--or maintain his bedroom like the proverbial pigpen--or let his puppy go hungry. I reject this notion, and have accumulated considerable evidence to refute it. Children thrive best in an atmosphere of genuine love, undergirded by reasonable, consistent discipline. . . Permissiveness has not just been a failure; it's been a disaster! (pp 13-14)

My Job to Try--Yours to Refuse

Another threat to the parent's confidence to govern in the home is the child himself. Recently a friend told me of this experience: her teenage daughter came home with a group of friends and announced, "Mother, we are all going to see a movie tonight; it's all planned."

When the title of the movie came up the mother said, "I'm sorry, but we don't go to that type of movie. You'll have to choose another."

In front of her friends, the daughter went through weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth to get her mother to change her mind. When her mother refused, she stopped crying, turned to her friends, and calmly said, "You see--I told you she wouldn't let me."

Later the mother asked, "If you knew that I wouldn't let you go to that movie, why did we go through all that?"

The daughter answered, "It's my job to try, and your job to refuse."

It is as if, over and over, the child is saying, "Let's see who will win: is it my turn?" When uncertain parents come into conflict with strong-willed, power-hungry children, they will lose every time. Parents who are not rock-solid in their assurance that they have the right to govern in their own home send an open invitation to their children to try to take control.

The Divine Right To Govern

The term the divine right of kings has been used throughout history to denote the supposed God-given right of kings to rule and reign over the people. It was believed that such kings even had the authority to decide which, if any rights, ought to be granted to the people. In the Declaration of Independence the Founding Fathers made it clear that the rights of the people are unalienable, which means that they are not given by kings, nor can they be surrendered by man. They are inherent in the make up of the divine nature of man.

In this same way, family government is not based upon parental authority to give rights but to sustain God-given rights. Parents--like all appropriate governments--must govern in their own private kingdom with justice, patience, gentleness, and love unfeigned. In other words, parents have the right and responsibility to rule and reign in their own homes, but only in so far as they use the principles upheld by God--who gave them the right. Parents are admonished, "provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1,4)

John Locke, whose writings were well-known and applied by the Founding Fathers, wrote,

Parents have a sort of rule and jurisdiction over (their children) when they come into the world, and for some time after, but it is a temporary one. The bonds of this subjection are like the swaddling clothes they are wrapped up in and supported by in the weakness of their infancy;

age and reason, as they grow up, loosen them, till at length they drop quite off and leave a man at his own free disposal. . . . Adam and Eve, and after them all parents, were by the law of nature, under obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the children they had begotten; not as their own workmanship, but the workmanship of their own Maker, the Almighty, to whom they were to be accountable for them. The power, then, that parents have over their children arises from the duty which is incumbent upon them--to take care of their offspring during the imperfect state of childhood.“ (*The Second Treatise of Government*, p. 32, 33.)

Parent’s Right and Responsibility

It is only right and reasonable that, whereas the parents are responsible for the actions of their children, they are also given the right to govern their children. Where there is no right, there can be no responsibility. The statement of Alexander Hamilton quoted at the beginning of the chapter applies to the family, as well as to government; thus, if the state or government of the land is going to hold the parents legally responsible for their children, it must assume the parent’s right to maintain authority.

The right to govern suggests that parents can and should feel comfortable in establishing rules, standards, and goals for the family. However, it does not mean that parents are of more worth, or superior to their children. Children are equal, although dependent--equal in esteem, as children of God; but not equal in experience, knowledge, perspective, awareness, or ability to maintain financial independence. While parent and child are equal, parents have the divine right of stewardship to care for, train, and govern their children; unless, of course, the parents have forfeited that right through abuse or neglect, in which case, like any other unjust governmental power, they forfeit their right to govern and may be removed by due process of law. While the state has a right to interfere when there is a violation of the child’s rights, the state does not have the right to assume that it

knows what is best for the child. Administrators and support workers merely skim the surface; school classes scatter at the end of the year, teachers come and go in a child's life--only a parent sees it through--only a parent has the intimate knowledge of the child's early years, needs, fears, loves, ambitions. No state agency, however conscientious, can take the place of parents who govern with firmness, justice, and love.

Principle In Action

Parents work with the tools of love, suggestion, persuasion, and patience; but sometimes they must resort to firm directives. For instance:

Child: "I like the poster my friend gave me; it's not obscene--that's just your opinion."

Parent: "You're right, obscenity is a matter of opinion, and in my opinion the poster is obscene. In this home my opinion outweighs yours. That's my right and my responsibility as your parent. You'll have the same right and responsibility when you are a parent and have a home of your own. You have two choices: either return it to your friend or throw it away."

Parents have the vision to realize that children need guidance in areas such as responsibility, health, spirituality, and social interaction. Here are some constructive ways to offer it:

Child: "But I've waited all day to watch television. All my friends get to watch television after school."

Parent: "Different homes have different rules. In our home we keep the television off until homework and chores are done. You'll really enjoy watching when you know you're all caught up. Turn it off."

Child: "I want ice cream for breakfast."

Parent: "Ice cream is not what we eat for breakfast. You need food to keep your beautiful body growing--how about scrambled eggs?"

Teenager: "My friends and I are all going to spend the night together at George's house this Friday night."

Parent: "Let me think about that." (Later) "I don't feel good about that idea. Why don't you invite a friend over to our house?"

Teenager: "I don't want to; why can't I go over to George's house?"

Parent: "I just don't feel good about that. You'll have a good time here."

Child: "Why do we always have to have family prayer?"

Parent: "Oh, no, we get to have prayer. Isn't it wonderful that we have a Father in Heaven who will listen to us? Why I could tell you a story or two about my prayers that were answered. . . ."

Teenager: "I don't think it's right that I don't get to stay at my friend's house. I think you're too strict."

Parent: "I appreciate your opinion on that, but I just don't feel comfortable with you spending the night at that particular friend's

house. You know that your mother and I have set the rule that you cannot spend the night at a friend's unless we have personally met the parents. I know that, right now, it may seem that we are too strict, but I don't want you coming to me one day to say, 'Dad, you weren't strict enough.' Hey, why not have the guys over here to spend the night?"

Teenage girl: "Everyone else gets to go to that movie. Why can't I go?"

Parent: "We have different movie standards in our family. We don't eat garbage and we don't watch garbage."

Assertiveness does not need to lead to confrontation--a firm but good-natured attitude is usually all that is required. Remember, firm but positive. However, there are times when only a stern directive will do. Parents who allow destructive comments to go unchallenged, in a sense, express approval of the behavior. Positive energy can be an effective tool in these cases; it sends a signal that the issue is an important one. As an example:

Teenage Boy: "Mom, you always do such stupid things. Why don't you get smart?"

Mother: (with sharpness, firmness, energy) "Don't. Don't ever talk like that to me again. I'm your Mom and I deserve your respect."

No parent needs to feel ashamed or unsure about defending his right to govern and establish rules in his own home. This is his privilege, ordained by God. The scriptures confirm this right and make explicit the responsibility that accompanies it; anyone who becomes a parent automatically accepts this right and responsibility, and with

them he receives the priceless opportunity to influence the souls of others for good. There can be no higher calling than this.