

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

--Proverbs 4:7

## Part I

# PARENTING BY PRINCIPLE

In this age of relativism, it may seem strange to grab hold of the principles proposed by the Founding Fathers and apply them to the home; to some they may appear as antique toned relics in today's modern world of discarded tradition. Some may argue that what these men had to say in their day has little to do with modern society--and even less to do with the family. Others may claim that there are numerous forms of government from which we may derive insights. Still others may assert that each family ought to establish its own government. To address some of these concerns, I have concluded that the first challenge of this work ought to be to explain why, we in modern society, so desperately need these principles. In addition, I thought it helpful to give a brief overview of American principles and how they can be applied to the home.

### **Robbed of Dignity**

A group of women were discussing the difficulties of raising children in this age of the "new morality." One elderly woman spoke up: "I'm just thankful that we raised our kids when we did. We had more help that you do today. It seemed that everyone supported the teachings of the home. We didn't have to worry about our kids' going to a movie, and the schools didn't try to tear away the kids belief in God and morality. Now it's different. I have a lot of sympathy for parents these days."

Parents who wish to raise their children to respect God and his eternal laws are perhaps faced with greater challenges today than

ever before. This eighty-year-old woman is old enough to have observed the extreme shift in values. In her day children were taught to respect God, country, and fellow men.

Today's youth are faced with a new world of ethical thought. The concept of a Supreme Being has been erased from all the school curricula, and along with it the instilling of character traits such as honesty, industry, and faith. The textbooks and the teachers have been silenced when it comes to religion and morality. Yet, while the spiritual hush blankets the nation, opposite forces clamor for attention, teaching that man is nothing more than an animal and a product of societal conditioning. In the aftermath of the philosophical wave of relativism the children are dragged vicariously through every form of vice via the television, movie screen, and contemporary literature.

The elderly woman, with a look of bewilderment, asked, "I don't understand; how did things change? What happened?"

Some point their finger at schools, saying "If teachers and administrators were doing their jobs properly this would not have happened." The principals and teachers retort, "the breakdown of the home has caused all the trouble."

Still others place the blame on the corrupting influence of the media. However, it seems that each in its own way has promoted a philosophy that has robbed the youth of their self-esteem and dignity.

### **The New World View**

In order to understand our current challenge of raising faithful children in a faithless generation we must gain a vision of the philosophical terrain of the land in which our children and we live.

Behavior is always affected by attitudes. Attitudes are formed upon values; and values are in turn based upon one's personal beliefs. In other words, behavior can be compared to the leaves of a tree, the part that can be seen, while thoughts and personal beliefs are like the roots, which cannot be seen but nourish and sustain the leaves (behavior). To change behavior one must change the roots of false thinking. While traditional beliefs and values have been discarded, others have taken their place. A philosophy called secular

humanism has crept into the very foundation of American thought. In short, the message goes like this, "There is no God, therefore man must rely upon himself--upon his own power, his own rational mind, to determine what is right and wrong. Since there is no God, there can be no absolute truths or values; they vary according to the time and place"--this latter idea is widely known as situation ethics. These ideas are interwoven into almost every field of study--including child and family psychology.

Here is a sampling of the changes in American thought that have taken place:

Traditional View

Secular or New World View

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|---|--|
| 1. There is a God.  | 1. There is no God, nor does it matter.                              |
| 2. There are absolute truths.                             | 2. There are no absolute truths; all truths and values are relative. |
| 3. Man is the offspring of God.                           | 3. Man is the product of evolutionary processes.                     |
| 4. Man is subject to God's law.                           | 4. Man can determine his own law.                                    |
| 5. Man is a free agent and can determine his own destiny. | 5. Man merely reacts to conditioning.                                |
| 6. Man has an eternal soul.                               | 6. Man has no life after death.                                      |
| 7. Civil law should be based upon God's law.              | 7. Civil law should be based upon majority rule.                     |
| 8. Sexual union should be reserved for marriage.          | 8. Sexual union is merely a biological need.                         |

Inherent in these changes lies the watershed of thought that has affected every aspect of American life--political, social, educational, philosophical and psychological. The secular view has crowded out the traditional view.

### **Spiritual Poverty**

Even those who have been a part of the problem recognize the consequences. Former President of the American Psychological Association, Dr. O. Hobart Mower, has said, "For half a century we psychologists have largely followed the Freudian doctrine. By abolishing sin, the psychologists have also abolished moral restraint. As a result, personality disorders are more pervasive and baffling today."

### **An Experience In Moral Growth**

A few years ago a Russian author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, was exiled from his country for his writings on the wrongs of communism. He came to live in the United States of America and was asked to speak at Harvard University. Of course, it was expected that he would extol the virtues of the American life and lament his past in the country of political and spiritual darkness, but this was not his approach. Solzhenitsyn's message was like that of a prophet crying repentance to the American people. He shocked some and offended others, but his message was poignant with meaning. He said that the West was in a state of "spiritual exhaustion." He asked Americans to look carefully into the mirror. He urged Americans to rise to values and goals beyond materialism.

"The human soul longs for things higher, warmer, and purer than those offered by today's mass living. . .How has this unfavorable relation of forces come about? . . .The mistake must be at the root, at the very foundation of thought in modern times. . .It became the basis for political and social doctrine and could be called rationalistic humanism. . .the

claimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him. . . Since [man] is doomed to death, his task on earth evidently must be more spiritual; not a total engrossment in everyday life, not the search for the best ways to obtain material goods, and then their carefree consumption. It has to be the fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one's life journey may become above all an experience of moral growth: to leave life a better human being than one started it."

The parent who is aware of the new shift in philosophy and moral values is prepared to recognize and counteract their influence upon the youth. But equally as important, this understanding will assist parents in determining whether books on parenting are based upon a faithful, eternal view of man or a secular view. The vision of the parent who believes in the divine dignity and destiny of the child far exceeds the humanist, for while the humanist hopes that the child conforms to society's standards, the believing parent hopes that the child will follow God's direction throughout eternity--not from coercion, but from commitment to a richer, more abundant life.

It is only with this understanding that we are prepared to appreciate why basic principles of American political thought, founded upon a perspective of a Supreme Creator, and rational thinking have such profound implications for parents.

### **Parenting By Principle**

God is the author of order, not of confusion. Just as there are natural laws that can apply to the physical realm, so there are natural laws that apply to the area of human relations. These laws, if applied, will enhance the most intimate of relationships--the family.

One wise political leader said, "The physical sciences capitalize on the lessons of the past, but the social sciences seldom do. In political and social relations, a single generation will sometimes duplicate the same error a half a dozen times. Unfortunately, every new generation of human beings seems to feel the instinctive and passionate necessity to reinvent the sociological wheel."

The Founding Fathers formulated a political system based upon what they called “self-evident“ truths regarding the nature of man, the rights of man, and the purpose of government. Their confidence in governing was based upon an accurate philosophical foundation of the nature, rights, and responsibilities of man. In the same way confidence in governing in the home is based upon the discovery of self-evident truths and the application of them in the home.

Confidence in any area of our lives is a result of sureness of thought and competence in action. As an example, we become confident at bicycle riding when we are thoroughly familiar with the basics of riding and when we have developed the required skills to put the theoretical knowledge into practice. All skills are developed in the same manner. On the other hand, when we are not sure of the basics--or principles--upon which success is based we become fearful, confused, and disoriented. To govern by practices that suppress moral agency and freedom of conscience--going against right reason--compounds the inner frustration. Why? Because we sense that we are treading on forbidden ground. Just as true principles enhance confidence, false principles insure confusion.

Parenting by true principles reduces the natural inclination to misuse parental power or to allow abuse of the child’s power. The principles in effect provide the checks and balances without which we would likely fall into tyranny or, worse, allow ourselves to become terrorized by power-hungry children. This truth applies to both parents and children.

As a unit of government, the home, rooted in correct principles sets the stage for “domestic tranquility,” security, law and order. It creates a climate for stress-free interaction and guilt-free parenting, but even more important a climate where adults and children can develop and progress forever. In such a home, the objective of having a family is to build eternal relationships of love, for a family is held together by love and mutual respect, not by law, nor by mandate.

## **Principles Establish Order**

We accept without argument the inconvenience of stops signs, speed limits, and other traffic laws, because we have accepted the underlying basic principle that order is expedient, valuable, and in the best interest of the health and safety of all. Traffic laws establish order and everyone benefits.

We accept the inconvenience of paying taxes because there is a principle proclaiming that: since all benefit. . .all must pay. When approaching a ticket counter, we go to the end of the line because we agree with the unwritten law: first come, first served. If someone were to barge into the front of the line, everyone waiting would complain, "Go to the end of the line!" The intruder could retort, "Hey, I don't agree with your standards; I make up my own!" It is unlikely, however, that the people in line would consider his argument. Why? Because it is self-evident that those who come first should be served first.

In this same way there are self-evident truths a parent can use in governing the home. Children sense that they are right and reasonable and therefore acceptable. They may oppose them, complain about them, and even rebel against them, but their sense of justice tells them that the self-evident truths are indeed right.

Now this is not to say that a parent with both knowledge and skills will not continue to wrestle with the task of parenting--it goes with the program--but once the ground rules are established, the confusion and doubt will be greatly reduced. This concept will become clearer in the following chapters as we explore how the principles are put into practice.

The following questions posed by parents indicate a need for greater understanding: What should be my goal in parenting? Do I own my child, or does my child own me? Do I have the right to make rules? Should our home be based upon a democratic government? Should children be expected to help with chores? When is my responsibility over? Should I expect my children to follow the rules? What can I do when they refuse? Are mothers to be servants? Should children be servants? Should we pattern our home after our neighbor's home? Are children basically good or bad? Should I insist that my children share? Do children need moral guidelines, or do they come with an inherent conscience? How do I know when I am being too strict or too lenient? When do I let go? When do I give up?

All of the answers to these questions hinge on principles of right reason. To understand the principle is to know the answer. The following chapters are devoted to the quest of gaining accurate knowledge (philosophy) and principles of right reason and applying these principles to the home in everyday practices.

## **Examples Of Parenting By Principle**

Following are some examples of the freedom of thought that accompanies parenting by principle:

**Situation One:** Do I insist that my children share their toys?

**Principle:** Ownership implies right of control.

**Practice:** A parent can encourage a child to share, but to insist or to force takes away the child's right to control his property. Besides, forced charity is not charity but mere compliance to coercion or authority.

**Situation Two:** Do I own my children or do they own me?

**Principle:** Children and parents are born with unalienable rights. The first right is the right to life and the right to control that life.

**Practice:** Parents can neither own their children, nor can children own their parents. Inherent within the right to life is the right to control one's own life. Parents have a representative right--a stewardship--over their children until maturity.

**Situation Three:** I want my child to be a doctor. Do I have the right to insist?

**Principle:** Children and parents are born with unalienable rights. The first right is the right to life and to direct that life.

**Practice:** While parents have the right and responsibility to train up a child--to teach, encourage, and so on, however, the ultimate decision rests with the child.

**Situation Four:** Do I have the right to control the music in our home?

**Principle:** Ownership implies an investment of time and energy. Ownership also implies the right to control property.

**Practice:** Children are not owners of the home; they are guests. They come invited for a limited time period. Since they are not owners, they do not have the rights of ownership; therefore, the parents have full control over the home.

**Situation Five:** Should I have to pay for my teenager's obsession with expensive clothes?

**Principle:** Parents have the responsibility to provide for the necessities of the child; however, a child's personal wants that exceed basic needs ought to be financed by that child.

**Practice:** The child who prefers a forty-dollar pair of shoes over the usually purchased twenty-dollar shoes should be required to pay the difference.

**Situation Six:** Do I have the right to expect my child to keep his room clean?

**Principle:** Ownership implies an investment of time and energy. Ownership also implies the right of control.

**Practice:** Since the child has not made the investment of time or energy in the home, he is to be regarded as a guest. The child's room is a part of the home; therefore, the parent has the right to insist upon order and cleanliness. Remember, when you choose to establish the rule of ownership for your child, you lose your right of control.

These principles of right reason blow the cobwebs of confusion away; they give authority, credibility, justification, and clarity of thought. They give answers to the question most heard by parents: "Why should I?"

They "create order and unity in the mind" which indeed liberates, uplifts, and gives confidence. To a degree the understanding of these principles can eliminate much of the horrible and ever-nagging guilt that parents experience.

