

Teach your children well

Look around!

Yes, next Sabbath, take a good look around you at church services and count the young people in your congregation.

At the time of writing, half of our local congregation are young people, less than twenty years old. I realize that this children-to-adults ratio is not the case in all of our congregations but still, there are lots of young people in God's church. Think of how many children you saw at last year's Feast. All of these young people are the children of the children of God. We might consider them to be God's grandchildren. And you know how dearly even human grandparents love their grandchildren! They are the greatest gift and treasure that God has given – or rather, lent – to us.

As members of God's church, we adults know what our commission is: to be preparing ourselves to be part of the Bride of Jesus Christ and, as God wills, to participate in the preaching of the gospel of His Kingdom (Matthew 24:14 & 28:19-20). But do we know how important it is, also, to be teaching our own children about God's Kingdom and His way of life?

The purpose of this article is to encourage you – especially you parents in God's church – to put a very, *very* high priority on training your children in God's way of life.

Why teach our children about God?

Yes, why should we be teaching our children about God, about His Kingdom and about His way of life? Is it really such a high priority in our busy lives? God says it is in these verses, which first drew my attention to this subject:

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the LORD or the work which he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:10-13)

This was the very next generation of Israelites after the one God had led into the promised land under Joshua. How quickly they forgot the One who led their nation out of captivity, into freedom and into the land of plenty. How could they forget these miracles and blessings so soon? They forgot because they "did not know the LORD or the work which He had done for Israel." Why didn't they know God and His wonderful deeds? Obviously, because their parents had not taught them. Here are some other scriptural examples of inadequate parental teaching about God:

Aaron:

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. (Leviticus 10:1-2)

Eli:

Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD. And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD... Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD'S people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them. (I Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25)

Samuel:

And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. (I Samuel 8:1-5)

David:

Yes. Even this man after God's own heart became so carried away with his king's duties that he neglected the priority of bringing up his children in God's way. And the results? David's household quickly deteriorated. Among the awful events that came to pass, David's son Amnon raped his step-sister Tamar, Absalom murdered Amnon and later committed treason against his father. (Read II Samuel chapters 13 to 20). The results of David's poor parenting skills went from bad to worse throughout the subsequent generations:

Solomon:

And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about... And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. (I Kings 3:1, 3)

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. (I Kings 11:1-11)

Rehoboam:

And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, with twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. (II Chronicles 12:1-5)

The history of Israel spirals downward from there. But the scriptures also tell us about the good examples of God's people who zealously taught their children about His way. They include:

Eunice and Lois: Timothy's mother and grandmother:

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also... And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:5 & 3:15)

Abraham:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice. (Genesis 18:19)

This was one of the reasons God chose Abraham and became his Friend – because He knew that Abraham would teach His way of life to his children. Can God say the same of you and me? Do *your* children know God? Do they know about the things He is working out in spiritual Israel today?

Let us return, once again, to the example of ancient physical Israel. God commanded them that they were to be teaching His way of life to their children in a consistent, ongoing manner. He is giving the same instruction to His people today:

**Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children - how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'
(Deuteronomy 4:9-10)**

And these words which I command you this day will be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

**You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
(Deuteronomy 11:18-19)**

Is it important? Is it a priority? It most certainly is! For emphasis, God stated His requirement no less than three times here in the book of Deuteronomy. He also repeats it in other places throughout the scriptures. This instruction was not just for ancient Israel. Although I have chosen Old Testament scriptures as my examples here, there are many New Testament scriptures which also show that we parents should be teaching our children about God. Here are some of the most relevant New Testament examples:

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:39)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right... And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1, 4)

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, (I Thessalonians 2:11)

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity... Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well... But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (I Timothy 3:4, 12, 15)

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. (Titus 1:6)

And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. (Hebrews 2:13)

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. (I John 2:13)

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. (II John 1:4)

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (III John 1:4)

Teaching Tools

We have seen what a priority it is to be teaching our children about God and His ways. But not all parents have adequate, inborn teaching skills. Some do and some do not. This is where God's church comes in.

Educational programs developed by various congregations of the Church of God include some effective lessons which are designed to be tools to assist parents in teaching their children about God. It is important to remember that these lessons are not designed to replace the parents' teaching; but rather to supplement and aid it. It is part of the commission of God's church to help the parents; but God wants the parents (not the programs' authors and teachers) to have the ultimate responsibility for the teaching of our families. This responsibility should, wherever possible, include the father in each family. We fathers would do well to follow Abraham's good example by taking the lead in the spiritual teaching of our children.

Our responsibility goes deeper than just telling our children, "Now sit down quietly and do your Bible lessons!" We should not restrict our teaching to austere, classroom-type sessions. Parents should participate in the lessons by going through the text and exercises to ensure that our children understand what is being taught. We might also be able to expand on the lessons (in a non-lecturing manner) by relating some of our own pertinent experiences on the subject under study.

You might be thinking, "But it takes so much time and I have three children!" Yes, it does take time, but we have already seen what a priority spiritual training is to God. Don't make the mistake of trying to cram a whole week's worth of your Bible teaching into the Sabbath Day or into a Friday evening. It might be a good idea to introduce your children to the *daily* Bible study "habit" by having them work on it for ten, fifteen or thirty minutes (depending on their ages) every day.

Although pleasant and effective formal instruction is necessary, God also instructs us to teach our children in everyday life: when we are sitting in our homes (for example, in appreciation of our food and other blessings), when we're out walking (for example, in awe and appreciation of God's magnificent creation) and when we're lying down (for example, when we're relaxing on the sofa on Friday evenings).
(Deuteronomy 6:7 & 11:19)

Ideas?

In the past, some parents have come up with some excellent ideas for making their children's Bible study more interesting, colourful and enjoyable without departing from true doctrine (as children's religious books very often do). We know of one church family who recorded parts of the text of their Bible lessons on tape... complete with sound effects! This made it lots of fun for the whole family and also helped the children remember the objects of the lessons as they played back their performances. We welcome any ideas you might have for youth Bible lessons.

In conclusion, the main points to remember on this topic are, firstly, that the teaching of our children is a very high priority with God and should be with us and, secondly, youth Bible education programs are designed to be effective tools to help your children and to help you.

Parents... teach your children well!

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