

PRESERVING THE HARVEST:

Keeping Our Children in the Faith—Part Six

By Philip Lancaster

In previous articles we explored some of the ways Christian parents may fail to pass along the faith to their children. In summary, we discussed the importance of fathers (and mothers) turning their hearts to their children through a loving relationship and also through a training process that thoroughly exposes the children to the Word of God.

We continue now by noting that, in spite of the efforts of parents, many of our sons and daughters depart from the faith, or from a faithful practice of it, because of the influence of godless people with their ideas and lifestyles. No matter how faithful we are as parents, if our children are heavily exposed to that which contradicts what we live and teach, they are in danger of falling by the wayside.

The Antithesis

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'..."

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:1,4)

God created the world "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The creatures were in perfect harmony among themselves and with their Creator. For our first parents there was no evil, there were no tears, no death.

All this changed the day that

Satan, appearing as a serpent, crept up to Eve and raised his fateful question: "Has God indeed said...?" With that question Satan altered the course of history on this planet. Notice that he did not directly attack the Creator at first; he simply raised a question about God's words. He subtly invited Eve to begin evaluating what God had said rather than just submitting to Him.

No matter how faithful we are as parents, if our children are heavily exposed to that which contradicts what we live and teach, they are in danger of falling by the wayside.

Having thus introduced doubt into the mind of Eve he followed up with an outright contradiction: "You will not surely die." God said one thing, and Satan said the direct opposite. This is the antithesis that, since mankind's fall into sin, has confronted every man, woman, and child: Satan's vision of life vs. that of the Lord God. Jesus described Satan as

"a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). All of history has been the unfolding story of man's response to the choice between the Word of God and the lies of the devil.

The "world" in the New Testament usually refers to human life and culture as it exists under the influence of Satan and in rebellion against God. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Thus Christians are called to separate themselves from "the world" in this sense:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-16)

The children of God must always be aware of the antithesis and consciously choose to love God and to hate both the lies of the wicked one and the way of life of those who follow him.

There is no neutral ground in life. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Either we are following Jesus, believing and obeying God, or we are believing and obeying the devil. Not to believe God is to disbelieve him. Not to obey God is to disobey. Not

to love God is to hate him. The urgency of making the self-conscious choice for God is evident in Joshua's plea to the Israelites:

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)

Every generation, every person faces this choice. To fail to choose self-consciously is simply to choose for the devil since it is impossible not to choose one side or the other.

Christian parents must help their children live the antithesis, embracing the truth and ways of God and rejecting the opposite. This begins with exposing the children to the Word of God and teaching them to apply the Word to their lives. But it also involves protecting the children from over-exposure to influences that contradict and undermine what the parents are teaching and modeling.

A Warrior Mindset

When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For

they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

These verses instructed the Israelites about how they were to deal with the pagan nations that occupied the land God was giving to His people. Israel was to destroy the pagans and make no covenant with them. Especially, they were to avoid having their children marry the pagans "for they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods."

The lessons of this passage are twofold. First, God's people are supposed to conquer the enemies of God. Israel manifested the antithesis by destroying the wicked, idolatrous nations. In the Christian era, God has not given the physical sword to the saints so that they may conquer God's enemies by outward force. Instead we have "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). King Jesus conquers rebellious mankind with the sword that comes out of His mouth, the law and gospel of His Word (Revelation 19:15; cf. Hebrews 4:12). Christians are called to confront the world with God's revealed truth and thus conquer His enemies by making them disciples of Jesus.

Christian parents should aim to raise their children with a warrior mindset in which they recognize the antithesis and seek not to accommodate the enemies of God but to win them by the proclamation of the Word. "For though we walk in

To fail to choose self-consciously is simply to choose for the devil since it is impossible not to choose one side or the other. Christian parents must help their children live the antithesis, embracing the truth and ways of God and rejecting the opposite.

the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the

obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:3-5). As the children learn to recognize falsehood, they will be less likely to succumb to it. As they are busy counteracting the lie, it will be more difficult for the lie to influence them. Children who are trained to be spiritual warriors are more likely to remain faithful as they become adults.

Avoid Intimate Associations With The Enemies of God

The second lesson of the passage above is that God’s people must avoid intimate associations with God’s enemies. If the Israelites married the pagans, they would be led to forsake the true God and worship idols (and this happened repeatedly through Israel’s history). Second Corinthians 6:14 is generally applied to this matter of a believer marrying an unbeliever: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” But marriage is just one example of an intimate association. Surely the point of this verse is that any compromising connection between believers and unbelievers must be avoided.

What constitutes an intimate association? It would be any relationship in which a heart-bond is created. If the mind is persuaded, the affections are kindled, and the will is drawn, it is an intimate relationship. The parent-child tie is one such relationship, as is marriage. Other intimate relationships include those between pastors and members of their flocks, teachers and their students, counselors and counselees. An employee and his co-workers may

well have an intimate relationship. Close friendships are among the most intimate of human associations. Actually, of course, there are a myriad of ways in which people may be connected such that a heart-bond is created. Any relationship that involves spending considerable amounts of time with another person may become an intimate one.

Parents should be careful who their sons and daughters spend time with. Hours of teaching, conversation, and modeling by parents can be counteracted by the hours a child spends with a friend, with co-workers at a job, or even with someone on an internet chat room.

Christian parents often fail to guard their children from forming intimate bonds with unbelievers. One of the greatest threats to the spiritual health of Christian children is the public school. Many of the

teachers proudly proclaim their lack of Christian faith, and even those who are Christians are not allowed to teach God’s truth, so the overall intellectual and spiritual atmosphere is godless. Add to this the influence of unbelieving and immoral classmates and you have a very negative environment in which to place a Christian child for the best hours of his day.

Parents should be careful who their sons and daughters spend time with. Hours of teaching, conversation, and modeling by parents can be counteracted by the hours a child spends with a friend, with co-workers at a job, or even with someone on an internet chat room. Many a child has fallen away from faithfulness due to the failure of parental diligence when it comes to associating with those who do not follow the Lord.

Of course these negative influences need not be personal. Impersonal influences can just as effectively undermine faith in the heart of a child. By “impersonal” we refer to things like music, television, movies, and magazines. A child in a Christian home who is not in public school, who has no non-Christian friends, and who does work outside the home can still become a casualty if he spends hours of every day watching television or listening to rock music. The lies of the devil become his meditation as he absorbs them through these media.

To be continued next month.

Philip Lancaster is a Samaritan Ministries subscriber and the editor of *Patriarch* magazine, a publication for Christian men, which is available for \$25 a year from *Patriarch*, PO Box 50, Willis, VA 24380. Or sign up online at www.patriarch.com.