

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT GOD!

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

Three weeks ago I was teaching at Cole Community Church's high school camp in McCall, Idaho. That camp was led by my son Rodd, his wife Kyna, and their staff of college students; and supported by several parents. In my first session I asked some seventy students what they felt were the real problems they were currently facing in their homes, schools, and communities. (Several of these students I would later find out were from broken homes or homes in which both parents worked.) Many were eager to talk to me and expressed their perceptions that the major peer pressure problems they faced were the gangs that were forming, the keg parties, the availability of drugs, and the consistent pressure and conversation about sex and who was doing it with whom. In our small-group discussions, one sixteen-year-old girl from the midwest told us that her family had been forced to move to Boise because her beloved seventeen-year-old brother was almost murdered by his drug dealer. As she told her story she began to weep. When we helped her to calm down enough to continue, she asked us to pray for her family and her brother, because he was again taking drugs.

What a generation we live in. It is a generation in which the basic family structure is threatened day after day, in which parents are overwhelmed and confused about what it means to be a parent, and in which children are looking for moral values and guidance from their peers. We as the children of our heavenly Father need more and more to ask him to provide us with his knowledge, wisdom, guidance, and power to become the godly parents and grandparents he wants us to be. We need to be praying not only for ourselves and the other parents we know, but also for our children and their children, as well as for the children all around us who are struggling with deep moral issues and at times even life-and-death issues.

Deuteronomy 6:1-15 gives us a model of a godly family structure. When Moses wrote it he was addressing a redeemed community in which the immediate and extended family were committed to helping each other as well as the children walk in the ways of the Lord. Now the church of Jesus Christ is the redeemed community in which there is a basic, solid family structure surrounded not so much by relatives as by the extended spiritual family, who are willing to guide us in parenting as well as pray for us and our children. Our extended spiritual family is made up of faithful Sunday School teachers and their staffs, other teachers, elders, deacons, pastors, and many others who are willing to come alongside us and our families with guidance, comfort, and prayer.

Moses has finished delivering the Ten Commandments to the people of God, who were now a nation numbering two million. According to Deuteronomy 5:28-29, the people told Moses that they had a heart to walk in obedience to the word of God. Then God said to Moses, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" In the Ten Commandments are the words that mean the difference between life and death---and the choice is always ours.

Now Moses leads this nation of God into a whole new subject: the need to become godly parents and grandparents. In doing that he will help generation after generation get a handle on some very foundational spiritual truth that all begins in the hearts of the parents: They are to fear, love, thank, and worship the Lord their God, and in so doing not only will they have wholesome lives, but they will leave a deep spiritual impression on their children and grandchildren.

Fear your God

Deuteronomy 6:1-3:

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

These commandments revealed to the people of Israel that Elohim--Yahweh (1) was their one and only living, righteous God, who wanted to have a loving relationship with them; and that if they would respond to his love, they would begin to enjoy life as he intended it to be enjoyed in harmony with him. These commandments were not given to restrict their lives but to give them fullness of life with him and with their neighbors as well. The "decrees and the laws" were the ways in which the Ten Commandments were to be worked out in their society as seen in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and the rest of Deuteronomy.

"...Fear the Lord..." These commands were given to the parents, their children, and their grandchildren so that they might all fear the Lord. The Lord God in their minds was an awesome and powerful God as evidenced by the earthquakes, darkness, thunder, and lighting on Mount Sinai when Moses was given the Law. That would naturally cause them to "fear" him. But the fear that Moses was really speaking of is that feeling of awe, respect, and reverence one has toward a loving God who offers joy, peace, and eternal life. It is the fear that springs from recognizing that he is God, our Creator, and we are his creation. It is the fear that comes from recognizing that it is he who gives us the very next breath of life on this earth, and as a result we find our hearts filled with love for him and thankfulness to him. God had promised the Jews that if they loved him with all their hearts and obeyed his commands, they would experience life as he defined it. His definition of life included the promise that all would go well with them personally and that they would be blessed with many children. Even their livestock would be blessed. In fact, the promised land would become "a land flowing with milk and honey"---milk from their increased herds and honey as a symbol of the sweetness of living under the lordship of their one and only living God (see Exodus 13:5).

The precious Son Jesus said of his awesome Father in Matthew 6:25-33, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes...O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

We are to live out our lives in the fear of the Lord, and teach our children and grandchildren about the one and only living God who loves us and wants us to love him in return.

Love your God

Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" is called in Hebrew the Shâma'; which means to hear with a heart to obey. This is the foundation truth of Israel's faith, and it has to do with the nature of God as one. This one and only living God Elohim-Yahweh has bestowed blessing after blessing on Israel. It appears that in this context Moses is calling the people to remember that their God has established a covenant relationship with them; and that he is the one and only living God in light of all the false gods in their Egyptian history, and he will remain their God in the days ahead when they will be exposed to the many gods of the

Canaanites.

According to 6:1, Moses has been given a direct revelation from God, and as his mediator he is carrying that truth to the people of God. "The Lord is one" may be translated as a title of God: "His name is 'One.'" He is the only real one, or unique, God among the many false gods. "As the one God (or the 'Unique'), when he spoke there was no other to contradict; when he promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when he warned, there was no other to provide refuge from that warning. He was not merely first among the gods...he was the one and only God and as such he was omnipotent." (P.C. Graigie, The International Commentary on the Old Testament, Deuteronomy.) The Hebrew word for one ('echâd) means not singleness but rather unity, like one bunch of grapes or the people of Israel's responding as one people. "There is only one God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence" (C. C. Ryrie, Ryrie Study Bible). This is an unfathomable mystery with which the human spirit struggles but which remains true .

How should we respond to this all-powerful, unique God? First, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Moses calls God's people to respond to him with a total lifetime commitment of body, soul, and strength, for he has delivered them out of slavery and is about to lead them into the promised land. This love should be expressed out of a pure heart and a lifestyle of trust and obedience toward him.

The precious son Jesus was once asked by an expert in the Law, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

He replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:36-38).

The second way we should respond to God is this: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts." One of the psalmists would later write in Psalm 119:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path." (Verse 105.)

"I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you." (Verse 11.)

"My soul is weary with sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word." (Verse 28.)

"Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me." (Verse 133.)

The third way we should respond to God is to teach our children his word. "Impress them on your children," or "...You shall teach them diligently to your sons...." This means "to have a marked effect on the mind or emotions, to arouse the interest or approval, to implant firmly on the mind or fix in the memory." Teaching the word of God diligently to our children means doing it with careful, steady, painstaking effort. Children are always watching their parents' attitudes and actions and listening to their conversations. Have you ever walked on the sand at the shore with your children? Remember how they would fall a few steps behind you, and when you turned to look for them you would find them trying to walk in your footprints, which you had already "impressed" on the sand before them? We are leaving an impression on our children each moment of every day we have with them (see Deuteronomy 4:9).

"Talk about them when you sit at home...." As parents we are not only to be growing in the knowledge of the word of God, but we are to be looking for those precious "teachable moments" when we can impress spiritual truths on our children and grandchildren. One way to do that is to arrange times at home when you all sit together. In our culture, perhaps the best time to sit together is at the dinner table. But it has to be a dinner table in which the children understand that this is a special time of the day, with the phones turned off and the door

locked so there are no interruptions from the outside world. It also has to be a time when all understand that they don't have to eat in a hurry, a time when all can share the daily events, the struggles, the confusion, the hurts, the joys. At the same time, over the meal flow the calm and reassuring voices of the father and mother, salting that conversation with the word of God so that the children understand He is to be the plumb line of truth for every hope, dream, and fear of life.

"...And when you walk along the road..." I had a wonderful experience two weeks ago when at a discipleship meeting my son Ron shared his life story with seven other men. In the course of that conversation he told us how much he loves his wife Sylvia and his son René. Then he said that one of the things he couldn't wait to do was take his son skiing; he wanted to show him the beauty of God's creation.

I looked at him in surprise and said, "Son, don't you remember? That's what I did with you and Rodd when we first began to ski together. We would sit together on the chairlift and look at all the beauty, and then we would thank God for his creation. Then on the last run each day all three of us would stand looking out over Lake Tahoe with the sun setting on the snow-capped mountains and thank God that we were alive, that we were a family, and that we'd had such a wonderful day together." Ron said, "Oh, I guess that's where I got the idea!" Such "teachable moments" do leave deep and lasting impressions.

"...When you lie down..." Another "teachable moment" can come each night as you put your children in bed and spend time with them going over the events of their day, reading them stories from the Bible, and praying with them. If you think about it there is such a reassuring truth in the simple children's prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

This is a prayer of confidence in God as the ever-present protector of one's life on earth, during death, and into eternity.

"...And when you get up." Some mornings are easier to use as "teachable moments" than others. I will always remember a morning in Hawaii with Eff Martin and his three children. Our wives had already left for home, and we were to be leaving that afternoon. I came by Eff's cottage, and all three children were lying in their beds listening to their father talk about Jesus. They would ask him spiritual questions, and he would lovingly seek to answer them. I felt as if I were "on sacred ground" as I lay down on one of the beds and silently watched this precious "teachable moment," which went on for about an hour.

The fourth way we should respond to the all-powerful and unique God is to surround our lives with his word: "Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." The Jews did this literally, and some still do today. These were outward symbols of the desire to hide God's word in their hearts. They would take portions of Scripture and place them in little boxes or small metal cylinders and tie them to their forehead, hands, gates, and doors.

Our family expresses this idea in a modern way. As you come into our home, you will find a small fish imprinted in the cement floor of the entry, which starts conversations with many of our visitors. On our front doorframe at home we have a small Jewish container made of tile with a portion of Scripture inside that we purchased on one of our trips to Israel. Our Jewish friends love it. We also have a sign on our front door with the words of Joshua to his elders: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Our relationship with Jesus begins in our hearts, and then we use outward spiritual symbols beginning at our door and continuing throughout our home to express our love for our God. There is no end to the loving ways you can remind yourself, your children, grandchildren, your neighbors, friends, and visitors of your relationship with our awesome Father and his precious living and loving Son Jesus Christ.

Adding fuel to the fire of the problems of teenagers in our society, there is a new and very disturbing movie entitled Kids opening this week across the nation. It is the story of the beauty and tragedy of youths who are confronting life in the nineties. The group of teens in focus appear to be parentless. Selfish and narcissistic,

they meet together and roam around Washington Square in New York City, giving their lives over to drugs, stealing, violence, and unrestricted and unsafe sex, which results in the spread of the HIV virus among themselves. The movie leaves the members of the group and many who have already viewed the film drowning in a sea of confusion and hopelessness.

Not only are godly parents to fear and love the Lord their God, but they are also to be thankful.

Thank your God

Deuteronomy 6:10-12:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you---a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant---then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Moses is saying to the people of God, "Your personal, powerful, loving, and covenant-keeping God Yahweh made a covenant with your fathers, and he will keep that promise. He will give you a land and all that you need to live in that land. As a result of his love your hearts and lives will be satisfied."

The precious Son Jesus made a promise to his disciples in Luke 18:28-30: "Peter said to him, 'We have left all we had to follow you!'

'I tell you the truth,' Jesus said to them, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.' "

"...Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Moses needed to remind these two million Jews that the God of Abraham who had appeared to Moses in the burning bush some forty years earlier was the one and only God who was powerful enough to break the chains of their slavery in Egypt and then deliver them from the kingdom of darkness and bring them to this moment of fulfilled promise as freed men, women, and children of God.

Not only are godly parents to fear, love, and give thanks to the Lord their God, but they are also called to worship God.

Worship your God

Deuteronomy 6:13-15:

Fear the Lord your God, serve [worship] him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.

God is pictured here as the loving and committed Husband of Israel. The two are one. Moses is saying, "Look at what God has already done for you! Live in respect for him, have a willing heart filled with a love to serve him, and swear by his name only. And live like godly people in the midst of a pagan people who fall down and worship many gods of nature or fertility, which in reality are not gods. But these non-gods nevertheless have so captured the hearts of the pagan people that they have even established immoral ceremonies designed to consume their children in the fires and give license to sexual immorality of every imaginable form."

The clear warning here is that if they decide to chase another husband named idolatry, they will soon find that their one and only living, powerful, and loving God will become jealous and will focus his anger on them, and they will lose the blessing of living in the promised land. God becomes jealous in a positive sense because of

his intense interest in the welfare of his beloved people. This adjective, when used of God, is employed to illustrate rather than to represent his emotions or his mind. Later we will find that the God who guarded Israel as "the apple of his eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10) did become jealous because of their idolatry:

"They made him jealous with their foreign gods
and angered him with their detestable idols.

They sacrificed to demons, which are not God---
gods they had not known,
gods that recently appeared,
gods your fathers did not fear.

You deserted the Rock, who fathered you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth.
(Deuteronomy 32:16-18.)

On Thursday I picked up the *Half Moon Bay Review* and discovered that our little village is now the home of two rival gangs who have already had a vicious fight in our local mall, which was followed by several arrests, and forced a sixteen-year-old boy to hide out in our community in fear of his life. Rarely in these reports is there any mention of parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles as part of the solution of this troubled world of teens---it's just cops, courts, and jails.

This is a most difficult time to be living in a fallen world if you are a parent of a junior high or senior high school student. Many Christian and non-Christian parents are confused and ill-prepared to deal with the many evil forces that are moving into our communities. Our children are faced with so many temptations. And if they, as so many before them have, reach out and eat of the "forbidden fruit," they will quickly find themselves on the road to utter destruction.

What are we to do? Parents who have been redeemed by our loving Lord and Savior Jesus Christ now need more than ever to turn to our God and ask him to give them a heart to fear, love, thank, and worship him. Parents who fear, love, thank, and worship the one and only living God as revealed in Jesus can make a marked spiritual impression on their children and their grandchildren, as they rely on the Holy Spirit and by his power buy up the many "teachable moments" given to them now and in the years to come. Let's ask the Lord to challenge our hearts to be willing to leave a deep spiritual impression on...

our children and grandchildren,
the many other parents and children within our spiritual community,
and the struggling parents and children in our surrounding communities.

Note: 1. The name Elohim connotes the fullness of divine power, and the name Yahweh means "I AM WHO I AM," the divine self-existing One, who is also the covenant God

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