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Deuteronomy 6:4-15 “How to Be a Godly Mother”

Intro. Imagine putting yourself in the devil’s place. Now, how would you set out to destroy and ruin God’s work in this world? How would you keep a new generation of children from knowing the Lord as their Savior? How would you lead a nation into moral decline? There are a number of different answers, but I suggest that Satan’s main attack would be upon the family. He seeks to separate children from their parents, and have parents arguing and fighting so that the family becomes chaotic. He will use whatever he can to try to fracture the family, and to ruin its effectiveness for God. He knows that if he can hurt and destroy the family, he can disrupt the primary means of passing down the Christian faith from one generation to the next. As in the case of Israel, he often succeeds in raising up a new generation that doesn’t know the Lord, or care about His ways.

The initial point of attack is often directed at the father. Fathers are being tempted to divert themselves from their wives and children by pursuing their own desires, feeding their own egos. When that happens they lose their concentration on loving, providing for, and caring for their family, and fail to bring strength, stability, leadership, and teaching to nurture their family in the things of God. Many Christian fathers have become preoccupied with business or other things, and they have rejected what should be their priority.

I am afraid that many mothers are too preoccupied as well. Not only that, but more and more women are loosing the traditional role of being a primary wholesome influence in the family. A good woman exerts a lot of control to keep her husband & children in line. But more and more teenage girls and young women are morally as bad or worse than the men!

And so this morning, I want to share with you an important passage of Scripture concerning the spiritual role of parents in the home. We parents are certainly to provide for the physical, emotional, social, and educational needs of our children. But someone said, “Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is better.”¹ So we should also provide spiritual guidance for our children. In a 2004 Barna survey of over 1,000 adults, 71% acknowledged that children are getting inadequate spiritual training. So I want to challenge moms, dads, and even grandparents to take a more active roll in teaching your children and grandchildren about the Lord and His will for our lives. Notice in v.2 that “you and your son and your grandson” are to keep God’s commandments. We are to pass our faith down to our children & grandchildren. And moms, if you follow these verses, your children will be more likely to honor you not only on Mother’s Day, but all the days of your life. For if you follow these verses, you will nurture and develop good and godly children, who love God, and who will love you.

So I will use this text of Scripture to answer the question, “How can you be a good & godly mother?” First of all:

¹ Old Union Reminder.

I. FIRMLY ESTABLISH A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

You cannot teach what you do not know. You cannot lead your children to know God, and love God, and obey God if you do not know Him yourself. There are 4 truths about your relationship to God that I see in this text of Scripture. V.4 gives the starting place:

A. Know God as He Is – V.4 is one of the most important verses in the Jewish religion. These verses are called the *shema*, after the first word of v.4, meaning “to hear.” The Jew is obligated to say it twice a day even to this day.

Do you know who God is? Do you know what He is like? Well, this verse tells us some of the most important and basic truths about God. The structure of the line, almost poetic, favors the rendering “Yahweh (is) our God, Yahweh is one.” This means that our God is unique, different, and exclusive. He is the only God. He is not just one of many. This is an unmistakable basis for monotheistic faith. This verse certainly does exclude all forms of idolatry and polytheism. Israel lived in a world of idolatry, and this verse was intended to keep them from idolatry.

Today, we live in a world of atheism, and false ideas about God. The god of Islam is not really the same God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is the Mormon god. Our children are exposed to these philosophies, and we must always affirm that there is one true, almighty God.

Furthermore, though this affirms the unity and oneness of our God, it can be translated, “Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.” If that translation is correct, this means that to our God, and to Him alone, belongs the name Yahweh. He alone is what that name means, the self-existent one. He is the living God. He is self-sufficient. That means that our God is all-sufficient for your every need. He is the answer to every problem you face. Aren’t you glad of that?

Parents, do you personally know the one true God through Christ? You can’t pass on to your children a knowledge of God if you do not know Him yourself.

B. Love God – In v.5 God says, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Christ called this command “the first and great commandment” (Matt 22:38). This commandment, along with Lev. 19:8, to love your neighbor as yourself, sums up all the law (Mt. 22:37-40). Love is a priority, for out of love flow all the other responsibilities of the Christian life.

What does this great commandment mean? Since God is one, our love must not be divided between Him and other gods. Furthermore, the demand to love God “with all the heart” excludes all half-heartedness. Do you love God like this? I am afraid we often do not. Have you heard of giving someone your undivided attention? Well, God wants your undivided love. We can’t love God as described here and love the world, or love our sin at the same time.

How do we love God with our whole being? Well, to know God is to love God. When you come to know Him in His goodness and grace, then you will love Him more and more. In fact, right before this text God reminded them of His goodness in giving them a land that flowed with milk & honey. Furthermore, God is love, and the more you know His love, the easier it is to love God with all your heart. I John 4:19 says “We love Him, because He first loved us.” Finally, one motive is given here for loving God. Moses calls Him “your God.” Love is founded upon a saving relationship with God. (Cf. vv. 12, 21).

Do your children know that you love God? Well, one way we demonstrate our love is by obeying God. But before you can obey Him, you must follow the next command of our text:

C. Learn God's Word – In v.6 God says, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.” This requirement calls upon us to commit God's Word to memory, as the idiom “in your heart” makes clear. In the psychology of the Old Testament the heart is not the center of emotional life and response but the seat of the intellect or rational side of humankind. It was the center of consciousness. So if we love God, we will lay His commandments to heart. Psa. 119:11 says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Ladies, do you remember when your husband was romancing you, and he wrote you those love notes? What did you do with those letters? You probably read them more than once. You retained in your heart certain passages. You kept those letters. Cheryl kept the letters I wrote her! Even so, God has written us a series of love letters in the Bible. And you should read God's Word. You should meditate upon the Word of God and reflect upon its meaning. You should retain God's Word in your mind and heart.

So if you are going to be the parent that God wants you to be, you need to come to know God in a personal way through the Lord Jesus. You need to love Him with all your heart. And you need to get to know Him better and better through the Word of God. Then, there is a final important aspect of your relationship with God. You must also:

D. Obey God's Word – We see this first in the command to “hear” in v.4. This is tantamount to “to obey,” especially in covenant contexts such as this. That is, to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear him at all. Furthermore, the close connection between vv.5-6 is important. In v.6 God refers to His commandments, which are to be obeyed. But notice that the command to love precedes the call to obedience. Obedience should flow out of the command to love God in v.5. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Here, obedience is construed as love; that is, to obey is to love God with every aspect and element of one's being.

Do you have a good relationship with God? Do you know Him? Are you learning His commandments, His will for your life? Do you love Him? One important test of how much you love God is this: Do you obey Him? If you do not obey Him, you do not love Him.

Now once you obey vv.4-6, then you are ready for the 2nd and final main point of my message today:

II. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE WORD & WAYS OF GOD

In v.7 God says, “You shall teach them [words, commandments] diligently to your children . . .” (cf. 20-21a). Here is God's priority plan for passing on the truth about Himself - from parent to child. It is not preacher to child, or S.S. teacher to child. It is parent to child. Then as the child matures he becomes responsible to the next generation, and so on. Paul says something similar in Eph. 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” God holds parents responsible to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now as we think of this obligation for parents and grandparents to teach their children and grandchildren about the Lord, let's consider a few main thoughts. First:

A. The Meaning of this Commandment - The word translated “teach them diligently” (*shaman*) literally means “to sharpen.” This is the only time in the Old Testament where the word is

used in the sense of teaching. So this verse actually gives the image of sharpening the mind and understanding of your children. We need to sharpen the minds of our children by teaching them the Word of God. Or the imagery of the word may be that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay. Even so we are to engrave into the minds of our children the teachings of the Word of God.²

Are you doing this? Unfortunately, a lot of parents are not doing a good job at this. Among U.S. teens, there's considerable ignorance about the Bible, judging from a Gallup Poll released this week. Fewer than half of the 1,002 youths polled knew that Jesus turned water into wine at the Cana wedding, and nearly two-thirds couldn't identify a famous quote from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. About one in 10 thought Moses was one of Jesus' 12 apostles.³

This reminds me of a story I read. The new pastor decided to visit the children's Sunday school class. The teacher introduced him and said, "Pastor, this morning we're studying Joshua." "That's wonderful," said the new pastor, "let's see what you're learning. Who tore down the walls of Jericho?" Little Billy shyly raised hand and offered, "Pastor, I didn't do it." Taken aback, the pastor asked, "Come on, now, who tore down the walls of Jericho?" The teacher, interrupting, said, "Pastor, Billy's a good boy. If he says he didn't do it, I believe he didn't do it." Flustered, the pastor went to the Sunday School Director and related the story to him. The director, looking worried, explained, "Well, sir, we've had some problems with Billy before. Let me talk to him and see what we can do." Really bothered now by the answers of the teacher and the director, the new pastor approached the deacons and related the whole story, including the responses of the teacher and the director. A white-haired gentleman thoughtfully stroked his chin and said, "Well, Pastor, I move we just take the money from the general fund to pay for the walls and leave it at that."⁴ It seems that nobody in that church was learning the Word of God! If the parents do not know it the children certainly will not.

Now this leads to another important point about teaching our children the Word of God. I have already touched on this, but I want to tie it in to this point about teaching. Let's consider next of all:

B. The First Requirement of Teaching - It is important to note that v.6 comes before v.7. Before you can teach your children the Word of God, you must learn the Word of God yourself. It's not good enough to bring your children to S.S. or AWANAs and leave them. You need to go to a S.S. class yourself so you can learn God's Word, and then teach your children, and answer their spiritual questions. And look down beginning in v.20, "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?'" Have you noticed that children ask a lot of question? God made them that way. That is one way they learn. So God goes on the say that the parents should know the answer to such questions. It doesn't say here that when your children ask a spiritual question, that you should tell them to ask the preacher. You should be able to answer their questions yourself! That's the way it should be.

Have your children ever asked you some tough questions? How about, "Who made God?" Can you answer that? Or, "Where does God live?" Or "Why does God let people die?" Or "If God

² The LXX (Greek translation of the OT) uses the word *probibazo* for this Hebrew word, which is use in Mt. 14:8. Metaphorically the word means "to incite, instigate, urge."

³ From *The Pastor's Weekly Briefing*, May 6, 2005.

⁴ From Pastor Tim's CleanLaugh List.

is all-powerful, why does He allow children to suffer?” Now when your children ask such questions, don’t tell them, “Go ask your mother,” or “Go ask your father.” You should be able to answer such questions. But if not, go ahead and tell them to ask the preacher! I love to answer questions!

So I hope you will make a commitment this very day to learn God’s Word. Read it every day. Go to Sunday School and church on a regular basis where you will learn more.

Next, let’s get more specific regarding:

C. How to Teach Your Children – There are 3 main thoughts that I see here. We should teach our children:

1. Diligently – In v.7 God says, “You shall teach them diligently to your children...” The verbs translated “teach” & “talk” are in the intensive form in Hebrew (Piel). So you should not be lax about this spiritual responsibility, but be diligent to teach your children about the Lord. This needs to be a priority. Parents, especially mothers, tend to be very diligent about certain aspects of raising your children. Are you diligent about teaching your children about God and His word?

2. Frequently - Moses said that the way this message is made indelible or permanent is by constant repetition. In v.7 God says you “shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Parents should be constantly speaking of the truth of God. It should greet them at every turn. Once a week on Sundays is not enough. The things of God’s word should be a normal part of conversation in all the activities of the day whether at home, or when you are away from home. You should look for opportunities to teach your children spiritual truths. All day long you should expose your children to spiritual truths. Of course, v.7 also indicates that we should spend time with our children, which is another key ingredient to passing your faith on to the next generation.

There are various ways to do this. At mealtime you can begin with prayer, and you can ask them to talk about what happened that day, and look for opportunities to apply God’s Word to various situations you or your children have faced. Of course, too many families are no longer eating together. We’re too busy going to one activity after another. That is not good! And when we do eat together, many families are watching TV instead of talking with one another. That is not good either! By the way, Dr. Dobson referred to a study that showed that adolescents whose parents ate dinner with them five times per week or more were the least likely to be on drugs, to be depressed, or to be in trouble with the law. They were also most likely to be doing well in school.⁵ So eat together as a family. Include the Lord & His Word in the topic of conversation.

Bedtime is another good opportunity to talk about the Lord. Most children want to delay bedtime, and they are highly motivated to listen to you and talk. So when your children are young you can read to them bedtime stories based on the Bible. Not only will that help them spiritually, but it will help them intellectually, and help strengthen your bond with them. Either at bedtime or at one of the meals, you can have a family devotional.

Why should you frequently talk about the Lord in the home? There is a positive reason: the child who knows that the Word of God is dear to the heart and much in the mind of his parents will have little difficulty comprehending their faith or accepting their teaching. Furthermore, advertisers know that they have to get their message across many times in order to make an impact. Even so, we need to reinforce spiritual truth repeatedly in order to make an impact, to engrave God’s Word

⁵ James Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys* (Tyndale House). The study was conducted by Dr. Blake Bowden of the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Center.

in their minds. Furthermore, they need frequent exposure to the Word of God because they will not receive any teaching of the Word of God during the 7-8 hours/day they are in public school. Instead, they will probably get frequent exposure to other things! The average child watches hours and hours of television each week. They also receive various messages through billboards, music, & computers. By the time the average child finishes elementary school they will witness at least 8,000 murders on TV.⁶ According to a recent study sexual imagery occurs once every four minutes on network television and three times that much on cable. And according to a nationwide study by the Rand Corporation published last year in the journal *Pediatrics*, children who watch television programming containing sexual content are almost twice as likely to experiment with sex as their peers who do not watch such programs. No wonder even 11-12 year-old girls are now dressing and acting like sluts.

But the witness doesn't stop with the verbal communication. We should also teach our children:

3. Visibly - There was to be a visible communication of the law of God. We remember what we see better than what we hear. And this is especially true with boys and men. My gender is much more impacted by the visual than the verbal. And even when you talk to men & boys, you need to give mental images to have the greatest effect. So notice what God says in vv.8-9, "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." While many scholars say these words should be interpreted "spiritually" or figuratively,⁷ they were interpreted literally by many Jews. They actually bound little Scripture verses on different parts of their body, or articles of clothing. The purpose of this is not only that we reinforce God's Word to our mind, but also that the words might be "for a sign." That is, they would identify their bearer as a member of the covenant community. We can fulfill the spirit of this verse when we carry our Bibles with us to church, to work, or to school. Read your Bible at break times. V.9 can be fulfilled by putting up special framed Scripture verses. You can buy a door knocker that says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

We should also teach by visible action. In v.17 God says, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you." Perhaps more important than your children seeing Scripture verses is for your children to see Scripture lived out in your life. An example will make more of an impact than mere words. Someone said, "When you live what you teach, your family has no trouble following."⁸

Finally, why should we diligently and regularly teach our children about the Lord? Why should we even have visible reminders of God and His Word? Well the answer is found in vv.10-12. There we see:

D. Keep Teaching Them Lest They Forget - The Lord warns what could easily happen if they fail to be diligent to love the Lord, and keep His word & commandment before them constantly. God says in v.12, "then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

In the previous verses He warns of a common cause of forgetting God: prosperity. In vv.10-11 he says, "So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which

⁶ SBC Life, April '98.

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch, Merrill, etc.

⁸ Larry Harris, Pulpit Helps, 4/04, p. 18.

you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant⁹—when you have eaten and are full.” You see, when the Lord blesses us with material abundance, it *should* cause us to thank Him and want to be closer to the Lord. But often, it has the opposite effect. We lose our sense of need and dependence upon God. Also, people tend to turn the focus of their attention to material things. They buy boats and vacation homes and spend the weekend enjoying their prosperity rather than worshipping the Lord. It is a strange thing that when people are blessed, they tend to forget the One who blesses them.

Let’s not forget the Lord in our prosperity. Don’t let your children forget the Lord. Always keep them in church. Teach them about God every day.

Conclusion: Don’t you want to have children who love God and obey God? Don’t you want children who mature socially, mentally, and spiritually? Then make sure you have a good relationship with God in your own life. Learn God’s Word. Love Him. Obey Him. Set a good example in your own life. Make sure you have a saving relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Then teach your children the Word of God diligently, repeatedly, and visibly.

The responsibilities of being a good parent are great, and at times overwhelming. But whatever God calls you to do, He will enable you to do by His grace. Trust Him for the strength you need. He has given you His Spirit if you are a believer in Christ. Rely upon the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

And those of you who will young children have the best opportunity to impact your children for God and for good. While they are young, make a commitment to follow these principles of the Word of God. And if you will, you will be glad you did.

Sources: Matthew Henry *Unabridged Commentary* (on Online Bible); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); John MacArthur *The Family*; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); John D. W. Watts, *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman, 1970). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Nothing available from Maclaren.

⁹ Thus, the conquest did not result in major destruction of towns and properties so therefore did not leave archaeologically definable evidence. Any attempt to date the conquest must therefore rest on some basis other than the presence or absence of evidence of destruction (Merrill).