

## Parenting is More than a Formula: Part 1

### I. Introduction: Parents are looking for a formula which will guarantee that their kids will turn out right.

- A. What formulas have people tried?
  1. Educational formulas: public schools, Christian schools, home schooling.
  2. Parenting formulas.
  3. Church-based formulas: Sunday School, AWANA, VBS, Summer Camps, Youth Groups, Family Integrated Church.
- B. Most of the formulas have some strengths.
- C. Each of the formulas has weaknesses and problems.
- D. Parents who have tried each of these formulas have experienced various results
  1. Proponents of each system can point to many examples of success.
  2. There are also examples of failure in each system – which often leads to the birth of the next system.
  3. Proponents of a given system will often blame all failure on user error – the parents didn't properly follow the directions.
- E. Many parents go from formula to formula looking for *the* answer.

### II. Parents need to exercise discernment when examining child training formulas.

- A. We need to recognize the difference between plausibility and proof when considering various parenting formulas. Acts 17:11 Eph. 4:14 I Thess. 5:21
  1. Anecdotal stories do not prove that a formula works.
  2. Sometimes the Scripture quoted doesn't prove what the formula advocates claim.
  3. An advocate of a particular formula may sound very persuasive without actually proving that his formula is true and biblical.
  4. Contrary data may be ignored or explained away.
  5. Some of what is asserted is demonstrably false.
  6. I encourage you to be good Bereans when listening to me or anyone else who tries to tell you how to parent your kid.
- B. Many “Christian” approaches to parenting are legalistic.
  1. Legalism involves going beyond the Scriptures. II Tim. 3:16-17 Pr. 30:6
  2. It is very important to distinguish between what Scripture commands versus one of many possible ways to fulfill our responsibilities to God.
  3. The biblical commands concerning child training are quite basic. We as parents are then called to work out the specifics in our own situation.
  4. Some make their particular methodology “law”, while failing to acknowledge that other approaches are equally valid ways to fulfill biblical commands.
  5. Some believers impose their extra-biblical rules and preferences on others.
  6. Sometimes the extra-biblical rules (traditions) become more important than what Scripture actually teaches. Mark 7:8
  7. Some people actually claim divine revelation for their child training methods.
  8. What is not biblically mandated is a family choice.
  9. Extra-biblical formulas often fail to take into account legitimate differences between kids and between families.

### III. Why do kids turn out the way they do? Three factors:

- A. Parents are responsible to raise their children properly. Eph. 6:4**
1. What the Bible says about parenting is pretty basic and simple. Eph. 6:4 Col. 3:21
    - a. Discipline them. Pr. 13:24 22:15 23:13-14 29:15 Dt. 21:18-21
    - b. Train them. Deut. 6:4ff Prov. 22:6 1:8 4:1 Gen. 18:19 Ex. 12:26ff 13:8,14
    - c. Don't provoke them to anger. Col. 3:21
  2. God blesses faithful parents. Prov. 23:13-14 29:17
  3. If you neglect discipline you will contribute to your child's ruin and your own misery. Pr. 17:21,25 29:15b 19:13
  4. Learn from Eli and David. 1 Sam. 2:12-17,22-25 3:13 4:11 2 Sam. 13 1 Ki. 1:5-6
  5. While parents have an influence on how their children turn out, they do not have control. The Bible does not teach parental determinism!
- B. Children are responsible for the choices they make. Pr. 20:11 Ezek. 18:5-13**
1. Not all rebellion is the fault of the parents.
  2. There are no "good kids". Ps. 51:1 Pr. 22:15
  3. What was the difference between Cain and Abel? Gen. 4:1-9 Mark 7:18ff
  4. God, like Cain, experienced rebellion in His child Israel. Jer. 2:30 5:3 7:28 Isa. 1:2
  5. As our children enter adulthood, they are responsible to make their own life decisions. Prov. 1:21ff 20:11 Ezek. 18
- C. God's sovereign grace is needed to save our kids.**
1. You can't save your kids! Eph. 2:1-3 Rom. 8:6-8
  2. The LORD must give them life and draw them to Himself. John 3:1ff 6:37,44 Eph. 2:4ff
  3. Sinful kids and sinful parents need grace.
  4. The LORD works in mysterious ways.

### IV. Concluding summary: Part 1

- A. Does the Bible offer a surefire formula for success in parenting? Prov. 22:6**
1. Is Proverbs 22:6 an unconditional promise or a maxim?
  2. Jesus warned that the gospel would divide families. Luke 12:51-53
- B. There is no guarantee of success. We are dependent upon God's grace.**
1. None of us is a good enough parent to merit our child's salvation! Heb. 12:10
  2. Our children are so sinful, they would reject perfect discipline. Ge. 8:21

## Parenting is More than a Formula: Part 2

### V. The biggest problem with many parenting formulas is that they can become pharisaical.

- A. Those advocating certain formulas are often assuming (explicitly or implicitly) a form of “parental determinism” – the (unbiblical) belief that how well you follow their formula determines how your kids turn out.
1. Examples of parental determinism.
  2. Failure is blamed on failure to follow the formula (keep the law).
  3. They make strong hurtful statements, which cannot be substantiated from Scripture, about parents who ‘fail’.
  4. If outcomes are determined by being under the correct outward influences, then does God pass our parenting test? Ex. 4:22 Isa. 1:2 Gen. 4:6ff
    - a. Why did Cain rebel after God Himself admonished him?
    - b. Israel turns from Him.
    - c. Why did Judas betray Jesus after hearing His teaching and seeing His perfect life for three years?
- B. Parents who depend upon formulas can tend toward pharisaical pride, as if we can save our kids by our good works and faithfulness.
1. Parents are divided into successful winners and unsuccessful losers.
  2. Those who seem to be succeeding (winners) will be tempted to pharisaical pride.
  3. Those who are having problems with their kids (losers) will be tempted to anger or despair.
  4. When people have trouble with their kids, they are told it was because they didn’t follow the system carefully enough.
  5. We all are incapable of perfectly keeping the law. Even if there was a “formula”, we couldn’t follow it perfectly because we are all still struggling with our own sin
  6. Parents afflicted with phariseeism go from one system (or guru) to another looking for the approach which will work. Ecc. 12:12
- C. Moralistic formulas can also create kids who are Pharisees, with the outside of the cup looking clean, while the inside of the cup remains filthy. Mark 7:6,18-23
1. Children, like adults, are prone to self-righteousness, wanting to feel good about themselves by following an attainable man-made moral standard.
  2. There are many outwardly obedient, well-mannered, good-looking children who are still lost and may rebel once they become young adults.
  3. *Obedience which isn’t motivated by love for God and His grace is dangerous (Fitzpatrick).*
- D. Pharisaical parenting methodologies will sooner or later lead to a train wreck.

### VI. Parenting is not about following an extra-biblical man-made formula; it is about the gospel.

- A. Many parents are bearing an incredible burden of (false) guilt.
1. Fathers don’t measure up to what the books say about the perfect dad.
  2. Mothers are very susceptible to peer pressure and perfectionism.
  3. Many are in danger of giving up.

- B. The law alone will not lead to parenting success.
  1. Man-made rules may have the appearance of wisdom, but they will not produce holiness. Col. 2:23
  2. We cannot be saved or sanctified merely by the law.
  3. Nor can our kids be saved or sanctified merely through the law.
  
- C. Parents desperately need the gospel.
  1. Confess we can't do it.
  2. Repent of phariseeism.
  3. Seek grace for ourselves.
  4. Plead for your kids' souls.
  
- D. Our kids can only be saved by the work of God.
  1. They cannot be saved by our works or theirs.
  2. They need to understand that they are not good, which is why they need a Savior. II Co. 5:21,17 I Pe. 3:18 Phil. 3:9 John 15:5 Rom. 6:1ff
  3. While it is our duty to seek to be Christlike in our families, it is more important to confess that we fall very short of being Christlike so that we can point ourselves and our kids to our need for Christ.
  4. We need to teach our children the Bible in a way that goes beyond moralistic stories which focus on what we should be doing and instead focuses upon what God has done for us in redemption.
  5. God often saves and uses people from the most (humanly) unlikely backgrounds. Ezek. 18 II Tim. 1:5 Heb. 11:23-25
  6. God sometimes works through those who don't follow our formulas.
  
- E. God is at work in our lives through our parenting. II Co. 12:9-10 (From Dave Harvey audio)
  1. We often want to look upon parenting as a means to display our strength.
  2. God uses our parenting to display our weakness so that we might utterly depend upon His strength. *When I am weak, then I am strong.*
  3. Stop trying to manage others' perception of you and your kids. Instead be honest about your weaknesses.
  4. Parenting in weakness is used by God to drive us to seek healing and strength in Christ whose grace alone is sufficient. II Co. 12:9
  
- F. Parenting is about God more than you or your kids. (From Parenting is your highest calling and eight other myths that trap us in worry and guilt, by Leslie Leyland Fields).
  1. Parenting is about fulfilling God's purposes, not our agenda. Mt. 22:37f 10:37-39
  2. Putting God first frees us to better love our children.
  3. God parents (us) for holiness, not happiness. Lev. 19:2 Heb. 12:14
  4. Parenting is more about people than a process.
  5. God calls us to be faithful, not "successful". Ezek. 2:3-4 3:7 Isa. 6:8ff
  6. We must rely upon God rather than formulas.
  7. Our ultimate hope must be in God, not our kids. Jer. 17:5-8

## VII. Conclusion

- A. Gospel parenting isn't just another formula.
- B. God is teaching us to graciously love our sinful children just as He loves us. Ro. 5:8